



The Holy See

POPE JOHN PAUL II GENERAL AUDIENCE *Wednesday, 30 July 1997* ***Our Lady places her personal holiness at the service of the faithful as an unfailing support for every Christian in the fight against sin***¹. Mary's exceptional role in the work of salvation invites us to deepen the relationship that exists between her and the Church. According to some people Mary cannot be considered a member of the Church, since the privileges conferred on her, the Immaculate Conception, her divine motherhood and her unique cooperation in the work of salvation, place her in a condition of superiority with respect to the community of believers. The Second Vatican Council, however, does not hesitate to present Mary as a member of the Church, nevertheless specifying that she is "pre-eminent and ... wholly unique" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 53): Mary is the type of the Church, her model and mother. Differing from all the other faithful, because of the exceptional gifts she received from the Lord, the Blessed Virgin nonetheless belongs to the Church and is fully entitled to be a member.² Conciliar teaching finds a significant basis in Sacred Scripture. The Acts of the Apostles show Mary present from the beginning of the primitive community (cf. Acts 1:14), while she shares with the disciples and some women believers the prayerful expectation of the Holy Spirit, who will descend on them. After Pentecost, the Blessed Virgin continues to live in fraternal communion with the community and takes part in the prayers, in listening to the Apostles' teaching, and in the "breaking of bread", that is, in the Eucharistic celebration (cf. Acts 2:42). She who had lived in close union with Jesus in the house of Nazareth, now lives in the Church in intimate communion with her Son, present in the Eucharist.³ Mother of the only begotten Son of God, Mary is Mother of the community which constitutes Christ's mystical Body and guides its first steps. In accepting this mission, she is committed to encouraging ecclesial life with her maternal and exemplary presence. This solidarity derives from her belonging to the community of the redeemed. In fact, unlike her Son, she had need of redemption since "being of the race of Adam, she is at the same time also united to all those who are to be saved" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 53). The privilege of the Immaculate Conception preserved her from the stain of sin, because of the Redeemer's special saving influence. As "pre-eminent and as a wholly unique member of the Church", Mary uses the gifts God has granted her to achieve fuller solidarity with the brothers and sisters of her Son, now her children too.⁴ As a member of the Church, Mary places her personal holiness, the fruit of God's grace and of her faithful collaboration, at the service of her brothers and sisters. The Immaculate Virgin is an unfailing support for all Christians in their fight against sin and a constant encouragement to live as those redeemed by Christ, sanctified by the Spirit, and children of the Father. As a member of the first community, "Mary the Mother of Jesus" (Acts 1:14) is respected and venerated by all. Each one understands the pre-eminence of her who brought forth the Son of God, the one universal Saviour. Furthermore, the virginal character of her motherhood allows her to witness to the extraordinary contribution to the Church's good offered by the one who, giving up human fruitfulness through docility to the Holy Spirit, puts herself completely at the service of God's kingdom. Called to collaborate intimately in her Son's sacrifice and the gift of the divine life to humanity, Mary continues her motherly work after Pentecost. The mystery of love contained in the Cross inspires her apostolic zeal and commits her, as a member of the Church, to spreading the Good News. The words of the crucified

Christ on Golgotha: "Woman, behold, your Son" (Jn 19:26), with which her role as the universal mother of believers is recognized, unfold before her motherhood with new and limitless horizons. The gift of the Holy Spirit, received at Pentecost through the exercise of this mission, induces her to offer the help of her motherly heart to all who are on their way towards the total fulfilment of God's kingdom.⁵ A pre-eminent member of the Church, Mary lives a unique relationship with the divine persons of the Most Holy Trinity: with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Council, in calling her "Mother of the Son of God", and therefore "beloved daughter of the Father and the temple of the Holy Spirit" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 53), recalls the primary effect of the Father's love which is the divine motherhood. Aware of the gift she has received, Mary shares with believers the attitudes of filial obedience and heartfelt gratitude, encouraging each one to recognize the signs of divine benevolence in his own life. The Council uses the expression "temple" (*sacrarium*) of the Holy Spirit, intending to emphasize the link of presence, love and collaboration that exists between the Blessed Virgin and the Holy Spirit. The Blessed Virgin, who is already invoked by Francis of Assisi as the "Bride of the Holy Spirit" (*Antiphon "Santa Maria Vergine"* in: *Fonti Francescane*, 281), by her example encourages the other members of the Church to entrust themselves generously to the mysterious action of the Paraclete, and to live with him in constant communion of

love.

To the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors the Holy Father said: I am pleased to greet the visitors from St John's University in New York, including the recent graduates of the University's Rome Center. Upon all the English-speaking pilgrims, especially those from Scotland, Japan, the Philippines and the United States, I cordially invoke the joy and peace of Jesus Christ our Saviour. Copyright © Libreria Editrice Vaticana