



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

GENERAL AUDIENCE

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Mary's steadfast faith throughout her life

1. The first beatitude cited in the Gospel is that of faith, and it refers to Mary: "Blessed is she who believed" (*Lk 1:45*). These words, spoken by Elizabeth, highlight the contrast between Zechariah's disbelief and Mary's faith. On receiving the message about the future birth of his son, Zechariah had found it hard to believe, judging it impossible since both he and his wife were advanced in age.

At the Annunciation Mary is confronted with an even more surprising message, the proposal that she become the mother of the Messiah. She does not react with doubt to this prospect, but limits herself to asking how the virginity to which she feels called could be reconciled with the vocation to motherhood. To the reply of the angel, who points out the divine omnipotence working through the Spirit, Mary gives her humble and generous consent.

At that unique moment in human history, faith plays a decisive role. St Augustine rightly states: "Christ is believed and conceived through faith. First, the coming of faith takes place in the Virgin's heart, followed by fruitfulness in the mother's womb" (*Sermo 293, PL 38, 1327*).

2. If we wish to contemplate the depth of Mary's faith, the Gospel account of the wedding feast at Cana is a great help. Faced with the lack of wine, Mary could have sought some human solution to the problem at hand, but she does not hesitate to turn immediately to Jesus: "They have no wine" (*Jn 2:3*). She knows that Jesus has no wine available; it is therefore likely that she is asking for a miracle. And her request is all the more daring since until that moment Jesus has not worked any miracles. By acting in this way, she is doubtless obeying an inner inspiration, since, according to

the divine plan, Mary's faith must precede the first manifestation of Jesus' messianic power, as it preceded his coming to earth. She already embodies the attitude that was to be praised by Jesus for true believers in every age: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe" (*Jn* 20:29).

3. The faith to which Mary is called is not an easy one. Even before Cana, while meditating on the words and behaviour of the Son, she had to draw on a deep faith. The episode of the 12-year-old Jesus lost in the temple was symbolic, when she and Joseph, in distress, heard the answer: "How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" (*Lk* 2:49). But now, in Cana, Jesus' response to his Mother's request seems even clearer and far from encouraging: "O woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come" (*Jn* 2:4). In the intention of the Fourth Gospel, it is not the hour of Christ's public manifestation so much as an anticipation of the significance of Jesus' supreme hour (cf. 7:30; 12:23; 13:1; 17:1), whose messianic fruits of redemption and of the Spirit are effectively represented by the wine as a symbol of prosperity and joy. But the fact that this hour had not yet occurred chronologically is an obstacle which, coming from the sovereign will of the Father, seems insurmountable.

Yet Mary does not withdraw her request, to the point of involving the servants in accomplishing the expected miracle: "Do whatever he tells you" (*Jn* 2:5). With her docility and the depth of her faith, she looks beyond the immediate sense of Jesus' words. She intuits the unfathomable abyss and infinite resources of divine mercy and does not doubt her Son's loving response. The miracle is an answer to the perseverance of her faith.

Mary is thus presented as the model of a faith in Jesus that rises above all obstacles.

4. Jesus' public life also tested Mary's faith. On the one hand, it gave her joy to know that Jesus' preaching and miracles caused admiration and approval in so many people. On the other, she sadly notes the increasingly harsh opposition of the Pharisees, the doctors of the law and the priestly hierarchy.

One can imagine how much Mary suffered from this disbelief, which she observes even in her relatives: those who are called "the brethren of Jesus", that is, his relatives, do not believe in him and interpret his behaviour as inspired by ambition (cf. *Jn* 7:2-5).

Although Mary is sad to hear the family disagreement, she does not break off relations with these relatives, whom we find with her in the first community waiting for Pentecost (cf. *Acts* 1:14). With her kindness and love, Mary helps others to share her faith.

5. In the drama of Calvary, Mary's faith remains unwavering. For the disciples' faith, this tragedy was overwhelming. Only through the effectiveness of Christ's prayer was it possible for Peter and the others, who were also put to the test, to continue on the path of faith in order to become witnesses to the Resurrection.

In saying that Mary stood at the foot of the Cross, the Evangelist John (cf. 19:25) shows us that Mary remained full of courage at that critical moment. It was certainly the hardest stage in her “pilgrimage of faith” (cf. *Lumen gentium*, n. 58). But she could stand there because she had remained firm in her faith. Put to the test, Mary continued to believe that Jesus was the Son of God and that by his sacrifice he would transform the destiny of mankind.

The Resurrection was the definitive confirmation of Mary’s faith. In her heart, more than in any other, faith in the risen Christ acquired its most complete and authentic aspect, that of joy.

To the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors the Holy Father said:

I warmly welcome the Lutheran visitors from Norway and Sweden and the members of the Swedish Christian Association for Religious Studies in Göteborg. I extend a special greeting to the delegation of the Ministry of the Interior of Thailand, led by the Minister. Upon all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors, especially those from England, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Thailand and the United States of America, I invoke the abundant blessings of almighty God.

**Holy Father's remarks
to relatives and friends of the Swiss Guard**

I extend a special greeting to the families, relatives and friends of the Swiss Guard, who have come to Rome for the swearing-in of the new recruits. What should have been a joyful gathering has become a shocking tragedy, which weighs heavily on the hearts of all and has greatly saddened me.

As I express my deepest sympathy to the parents and relatives of Commandant Alois Estermann and his wife, I pray that the Lord will receive their souls into his peace. Commandant Estermann was a person of deep faith and unswerving devotion to duty; for 18 years he gave loyal and valuable service, for which I am personally grateful to him.

I am also close to the sorrow of the relatives of Vice-Corporal Cédric Tornay, who now stands before the judgement seat of God and whom I entrust to his mercy.

I invite everyone to join me in prayer, asking for the strengthening comfort of God, the Lord of life and death.

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