



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Wednesday 9 December 1998

Mary's motherhood is linked to the Spirit "As the bond with Mary grows deeper, so the action of the Spirit in the life of the Church becomes more fruitful", the Holy Father said at the General Audience of Wednesday, 9 December, as he reflected on Mary's co-operation with the Holy Spirit in the work of salvation. The Pope stated that "the humble servant of the Lord does not compete with the role of the Holy Spirit; on the contrary, she is called by the same Spirit to co-operate in a maternal way with him". Here is a translation of the Holy Father's catechesis, which was the 28th in the series on the Holy Spirit and was given in Italian.¹ To conclude our reflection on the Holy Spirit in this year dedicated to him on our journey to the Great Jubilee, we lift our eyes to Mary. Her consent given at the Annunciation 2,000 years ago represents the starting point of humanity's new history. The Son of God, in fact, became incarnate and began to dwell among us when Mary said to the angel: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (*Lk* 1:38). Mary's co-operation with the Holy Spirit, shown in the Annunciation and the Visitation, is expressed in an attitude of continual docility to the Paraclete's inspirations. Conscious of the mystery of her divine Son, Mary lets herself be guided by the Spirit to act in a way appropriate to her mission as mother. As a true woman of prayer, the Virgin asks the Holy Spirit to complete the work begun at conception, so that her child will grow "in wisdom and in stature, and in favour with God and man" (*Lk* 2:52). In this way Mary is presented as a model for parents by showing the need to call upon the Holy Spirit to find the right way in the difficult task of education.² The story of Jesus' presentation in the temple coincides with an important intervention of the Holy Spirit. Mary and Joseph went to the temple to "present" (cf. *Lk* 2:22), that is, to offer Jesus according to the law of Moses, which prescribed the redemption of first-born sons and the purification of the mother. Experiencing the profound meaning of this rite as an expression of sincere offering, they were enlightened by the words Simeon spoke under the special impulse of the Holy Spirit. Luke's account explicitly stresses the influence of the Holy Spirit on the life of this elderly man. He had been promised by the Spirit that he would not die without having seen the Messiah. And so, "inspired by the Spirit he came into the temple" (*Lk* 2:27), just as Mary and Joseph were bringing the child there. Thus it was the Holy Spirit who arranged the meeting. It was he who inspired in the elderly Simeon a canticle celebrating the future of the child who came as "a light for revelation to the Gentiles" and "for glory to your people Israel" (*Lk* 2:32). Mary and Joseph marveled at these words which widen Jesus' mission to include all peoples. And again it was the Spirit who led Simeon to make a sorrowful prophecy: Jesus will be "a sign of contradiction" and "a sword will pierce [Mary's] soul" (*Lk* 2:34, 35). With these words the Holy Spirit prepared Mary for the great trial which awaited her

and gave to the rite of presenting her child the value of a sacrifice offered for love. When Mary took her son from Simeon's arms, she understood that she was receiving him in order to offer him. Her motherhood would be involved in Jesus' destiny and any opposition to him would touch her heart as well.³ Mary's presence at the Cross is the sign that the mother followed to the end the sorrowful way marked out by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of Simeon. In the words Jesus spoke on Calvary to his Mother and to the beloved disciple, we see another feature of the Holy Spirit's action: he ensures that the sacrifice is fruitful. Jesus' words themselves reveal a "Marian" aspect of this fruitfulness: "Woman, behold, your son!" (*Jn* 19:26). In these words the Holy Spirit does not explicitly appear. But since the event of the Cross, like Christ's entire life, takes place in the Holy Spirit (cf. *Dominum et Vivificantem*, nn. 40-41), it is precisely in the same Spirit that the Saviour asks his Mother to consent to her Son's sacrifice in order to become the mother of a multitude of children. He ensures that this supreme offering of Jesus' Mother will have immense fruit: a new motherhood destined to spread to all men and women. From the Cross the Saviour wished to pour out upon humanity rivers of living water (cf. *Jn* 7:38), that is, the abundance of the Holy Spirit. But he wanted this outpouring of grace to be linked to a mother's face, his Mother's. Mary now appears as the new Eve, mother of the living, or the Daughter of Zion, mother of all peoples. The gift of a universal mother was included in the Messiah's redeeming mission: "After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished ...", the Evangelist writes after the two statements: "Woman, behold, your son!" and "Behold, your mother!" (*Jn* 19:26-28). From this scene we can sense the harmony of God's plan regarding Mary's role in the saving action of the Holy Spirit. In the mystery of the Incarnation, her co-operation with the Spirit played an essential role; in the mystery of the birth and development of God's children, Mary's maternal assistance also accompanies the work of the Holy Spirit.⁴ In the light of Christ's statement on Calvary, Mary's presence in the community as it waits for Pentecost acquires its full value. St Luke, who called attention to Mary's role in Jesus' birth, wanted to stress her significant presence at the Church's birth. The community is composed not only of the Apostles and disciples, but also of women, the only one of whom Luke names is "Mary, the Mother of Jesus" (*Acts* 1:14). The Bible offers us no further information about Mary after the drama on Calvary. But it is very important to know that she shared in the life of the early community and in its fervent, unanimous prayer. Without doubt, she was present at the outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost. The Spirit who already dwelt in Mary, working marvels of grace in her, now comes down again into her heart, communicating the gifts and charisms necessary for the exercise of her spiritual motherhood.⁵ Mary continues to exercise in the Church the motherhood entrusted to her by Christ. In this maternal mission, the humble servant of the Lord does not compete with the role of the Holy Spirit; on the contrary, she is called by the same Spirit to co-operate in a maternal way with him. He continually revives the Church's memory of Jesus' words to the beloved disciple: "Behold, your mother!", and invites believers to love Mary as Christ loved her. As the bond with Mary grows deeper, so the action of the Spirit in the life of the Church becomes more

fruitful.

Dear Brothers and Sisters, In our preparation for the Great Jubilee, we turn once more to the figure of Mary and her relationship with the Holy Spirit. From the moment of the Annunciation, Mary was drawn into a mystery of cooperation with the Holy Spirit which will continue until the end of time. It was the Holy Spirit who inspired Simeon to foretell the suffering which Mary's motherhood would bring: "a sword will pierce your heart" (*Lk* 2:34-35). This prophecy was fulfilled as Mary stood at the foot of the Cross. Yet it was there too that the Holy Spirit guaranteed the fruitfulness of her sacrifice. Calvary reveals the close and enduring link between the gift of the Holy Spirit and the gift of Mary as mother. From the crucified Christ, living water flowed forth, the fullness of the Holy Spirit (cf. *Jn* 7:38); and it was the crucified Christ who gave Mary as mother not only to the beloved disciple but to the whole Church: "This is your son; this is your mother" (*Jn* 19:26-28). The link between the gift of the Holy Spirit and the motherhood of Mary emerges again at Pentecost, when

she waited with the disciples for the coming of the Holy Spirit, whose fire descended upon all of them together. Therefore, as the bond with Mary grows stronger, so the action of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church grows more fruitful. *To the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors, the Holy Father said:* I extend a warm welcome to those taking part in the International Catholic Stewardship Seminar. I thank you for your efforts to increase awareness among the faithful of their responsibility for the Church's mission. I greet the Kambilolo Village Group from Kenya. Upon all the English-speaking visitors and pilgrims, especially from Denmark, Kenya and the United States of America, I invoke the loving care of Mary, Mother of the Church, and the peace of Jesus Christ her Son.