



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II DURING HIS VISIT TO THE NATIONAL SHRINE OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

*Washington
Sunday, 7 October 1979*

My first desire in this National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception is to direct my thoughts, to turn my heart to the woman of salvation history.

In the eternal design of God, this woman, Mary, was chosen to enter into the work of the Incarnation and Redemption. And this design of God was to be actuated through her free decision given in obedience to the divine will. Through her *yes*—a *yes* that pervades and is reflected in all history, she consented to be the Virgin Mother of our saving God, the handmaid of the Lord and, at the same time, the Mother of all the faithful who in the course of centuries would become the brothers and sisters of her Son.

Through her, the Sun of Justice was to rise in the world. Through her, the great healer of humanity, the Reconciler of hearts and consciences—her Son, the God-man Jesus Christ—was to transform the human condition and, by his death and Resurrection, uplift the entire human family.

As a great sign that appeared in the heavens in the fulness of time, the woman dominates all history as the Virgin Mother of the Son, and as the Spouse of the Holy Spirit—as the handmaid of humanity. And the woman becomes also—by association with her Son—the sign of contradiction to the world and, at the same time, the sign of hope whom all generations shall call blessed: the woman who conceived spiritually before she conceived physically; the woman who accepted the word of God; the woman who was inserted intimately and irrevocably into the mystery of the Church, exercising a spiritual Motherhood with regard to all people; the woman who is honored as

Queen of Apostles, without herself being inserted into the hierarchical constitution of the Church. And yet this woman made all hierarchy possible, because she gave to the world the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls.

This woman, this Mary of the Gospel, who is not mentioned as being at the Last Supper, comes back again at the foot of the Cross, in order to consummate her contribution to salvation history. By her courageous act, she prefigures and anticipates the courage of all women throughout the ages who concur in bringing forth Christ in every generation. At Pentecost, the Virgin Mother once again comes forward to exercise her role in union with the Apostles, with and in and over the Church. Yet again she conceives of the Holy Spirit, to bring forth Jesus in the fulness of his Body, the Church—never to leave him, never to abandon him, but to continue to love and serve him through the ages.

This is the woman of history and destiny, who inspires us today: the woman who speaks to us of femininity, human dignity, and love, and who is the greatest expression of total consecration to Jesus Christ, in whose name we are gathered today.

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