

READ REFLECT REVIEW

SESSION 7

LETTERS, ENCYCLICALS AND LIVES OF SAINTS MARY, MOTHER OF FAITH

READ

ON SEPTEMBER 3, 1997, POPE JOHN PAUL II DURING A GENERAL AUDIENCE SPOKE OF MARY, AS MODEL OF FAITH, HOPE AND CHARITY. SO, THE CHURCH LOOKS TO MARY. THE CHURCH LIVES BY FAITH, SEEING IN HER "WHO BELIEVED THAT THERE WOULD BE A FULFILMENT OF WHAT WAS SPOKEN TO HER FROM THE LORD" (LK 1:45), THE FIRST AND PERFECT EXPRESSION OF A MODEL OF FAITH.

MARY ALSO BECOMES A MODEL OF HOPE FOR THE CHURCH. IN LISTENING TO THE ANGEL'S MESSAGE, THE VIRGIN FIRST DIRECTS HER HOPE TO THE KINGDOM WITHOUT END, WHICH JESUS HAD BEEN SENT TO ESTABLISH. SHE STANDS FIRM NEAR THE CROSS OF HER SON, WAITING FOR THE DIVINE PROMISE TO BE FULFILLED. AFTER PENTECOST, THE MOTHER OF JESUS SUSTAINS THE CHURCH'S HOPE DESPITE THE THREAT OF PERSECUTION. SHE IS THUS THE MOTHER OF HOPE FOR THE COMMUNITY OF BELIEVERS AND FOR INDIVIDUAL CHRISTIANS, AND SHE ENCOURAGES AND GUIDES HER CHILDREN AS THEY AWAIT THE KINGDOM, SUPPORTING THEM IN THEIR DAILY TRIALS AND THROUGHOUT THE EVENTS OF HISTORY, HOWEVER TRAGIC.

LASTLY, THE CHURCH SEES IN MARY THE MODEL OF HER CHARITY. BY LOOKING AT THE SITUATION OF THE FIRST CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY, WE DISCOVER THAT THE UNANIMITY OF THEIR HEARTS, WHICH WAS SHOWN AS THEY AWAITED PENTECOST, IS ASSOCIATED WITH THE PRESENCE OF THE HOLY VIRGIN (CF. ACTS 1:14). AND PRECISELY BECAUSE OF MARY'S RADIANT CHARITY, IT IS POSSIBLE TO ALWAYS MAINTAIN HARMONY AND FRATERNAL LOVE WITHIN THE CHURCH.

AS THE MOTHER OF GOD, THE VIRGIN MARY HAS A UNIQUE POSITION AMONG THE SAINTS, INDEED, AMONG ALL CREATURES. SHE IS EXALTED, YET STILL ONE OF US. SO, HOW DOES OUR VENERATION OF MARY AND THE SAINTS RELATE TO OUR WORSHIP OF GOD?

THE HONOUR WE GIVE TO GOD ALONE IS PROPERLY CALLED ADORATION, THE HIGHEST HONOUR WE CAN GIVE. THE HONOUR WE GIVE TO MARY AND THE SAINTS IS CALLED VENERATION. PROPER VENERATION OF THE SAINTS DOES NOT INTERFERE WITH THE WORSHIP DUE TO GOD, BUT RATHER FOSTERS IT. OUR COMMUNION WITH THOSE IN HEAVEN, IF IT IS UNDERSTOOD IN THE FULLER LIGHT OF FAITH ACCORDING TO ITS GENUINE NATURE, IN NO WAY WEAKENS, BUT CONVERSELY, MORE THOROUGHLY ENRICHES THE WORSHIP WE GIVE TO GOD THE FATHER, THROUGH CHRIST, IN THE SPIRIT.

WHY IS MARY IMPORTANT IN THE CATHOLIC FAITH? MARY IS A CENTRAL FIGURE IN THE CATHOLIC FAITH AND HER LIFE ILLUSTRATES HOW GOD WORKS IN OUR LIVES. MARY CAME FROM A SIMPLE BACKGROUND AND YET SHE WAS CALLED BY GOD TO FULFILL A VERY EXTRAORDINARY ROLE, THAT OF BECOMING THE MOTHER OF JESUS CHRIST. THIS ROLE WAS NO EASY FEAT. DURING MARY'S TIME, WOMEN DID NOT HAVE EQUAL STANDING AS MEN IN SOCIETY. SECONDLY, WHEN JESUS WAS BORN, KING HEROD ORDERED INFANTS EVERYWHERE TO BE SLAUGHTERED SO MARY

HAD TO FLEE TO EGYPT TO ESCAPE THE MASSACRE AND SAVE HER CHILD. DESPITE THE HARDSHIPS SHE HAD TO GO THROUGH, MARY BECAME AN INSTRUMENT OF FAITH AND STAYED COMMITTED IN HER ROLE OF BRINGING TO LIFE GOD'S PROMISED SON.

POPE PAUL VI GAVE MARY THE TITLE "MOTHER OF THE CHURCH" AT VATICAN II. THIS TITLE IS BECAUSE MARY IS THE MOTHER OF CHRIST, THE HEAD, AND THE MOTHER OF THE FAITHFUL, THE BODY. ALL "GENERATIONS" OF CHRISTIANS SHARE "ONE BODY AND ONE SPIRIT...ONE HOPE...ONE LORD, ONE FAITH, ONE BAPTISM, [AND] ONE GOD AND FATHER OF US ALL" (EPH 4:5-6).

WITH THIS UNDERSTANDING, WE SEE THAT PROPER VENERATION OF MARY DOES NOT DETRACT FROM WORSHIP OF GOD. EVEN AS THE MOTHER OF THE SAVIOUR, MARY HAS A PLACE THAT IS IN EVERY WAY SUBORDINATE TO AND DEPENDENT UPON THAT OF HER SON, WHO IS THE ONE MEDIATOR BETWEEN GOD AND HUMANITY. THE MATERNAL ROLE THAT MARY FULFILLS TOWARD US AS MOTHER OF THE CHURCH "IN NO WAY OBSCURES OR DIMINISHES THIS UNIQUE MEDIATION OF CHRIST, BUT RATHER SHOWS HIS POWER".

THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL EXPLAINED VERY CLEARLY THAT MARY CAN BE SAID TO FULFILL A MEDIATING ROLE ONLY IN A SECONDARY AND DERIVATIVE MANNER: WHAT MARY DOES FOR THE SALVATION OF THE HUMAN FAMILY DOES NOT COME FROM HER OWN POWER, BUT FROM A GIFT OF DIVINE GRACE THAT IS BESTOWED ON HER THROUGH HER SON. ALL THE SALVIFIC INFLUENCE THAT SHE BESTOWS ON US IS PRODUCED "NOT FROM SOME INNER NECESSITY, BUT FROM THE DIVINE PLEASURE.

THROUGHOUT THE CENTURIES, THE CHURCH HAS TURNED TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN TO COME CLOSER TO CHRIST. MANY FORMS OF PIETY TOWARD THE MOTHER OF GOD DEVELOPED THAT HELP BRING US CLOSER TO HER SON. IN SPE SALVE, POPE BENEDICT WRITES: *THUS, YOU REMAIN IN THE MIDST OF THE DISCIPLES AS THEIR MOTHER, AS THE MOTHER OF HOPE. HOLY MARY, MOTHER OF GOD, OUR MOTHER, TEACH US TO BELIEVE, TO HOPE, TO LOVE WITH YOU. SHOW US THE WAY TO HIS KINGDOM! STAR OF THE SEA, SHINE UPON US AND GUIDE US ON OUR WAY (50)*

REFLECT

WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON THIS LAST QUOTE FROM POPE BENEDICT IN SPE SALVE, AS HE DESCRIBES MARY AS OUR MOTHER ?

REVIEW

HOW CAN MARY, AS MODEL OF FAITH, HOPE AND CHARITY INFLUENCE OUR WORLD TODAY IN THE UPTAKE OF THESE VIRTUES?