

(English translation)

Rocca di Papa, 23 November 1973

Our Mother, Mary Desolate

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Now let's consider the simple account of Mary's desolation as narrated in the Gospel.

When Jesus, pointing to John, says: "Woman, behold your son" (Jn 19:26), to Mary those words sound like a substitution. Mary goes through the trial of no longer being the Mother of Jesus. It is the moment in which Mary gives back to God her divine maternity which He had given to her. It is a *fiat* which is different from the first one. With the first *fiat* in the Annunciation she, who was consecrated as a virgin to God for all her life, seems to have to change her plans. She will become a mother while remaining a virgin.

With the second *fiat*, at the foot of the cross, she renounces being the Mother of Jesus and only in this way does she become the mother of everyone. She acquires the divine maternity of an infinite number of persons by renouncing the divine maternity of her first Son.

Pius XII confirms the way we consider Mary: "She who was intimately united with her Son, offered Him on Golgotha to the Eternal Father.... Her mother's rights and her mother's love were included in the holocaust. Thus she who, according to the flesh, was the mother of our Head ... became, according to the Spirit, the mother of all His members"¹.

The suffering that Mary must have experienced when Jesus cried out: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" is unimaginable. It was the hour in which she would have wanted to be closest to Him. But she had renounced every maternal privilege. She had had no right to have been His mother and, in the light of this other maternity which Jesus had indicated to her, she could neither complain nor be upset. Therefore, Jesus in that moment had neither Mother nor Father. He was nothing born from nothing.

And Mary too was suspended in nothingness. Her greatness had been her divine motherhood. Now it was as if this had been taken away from her. And so in that moment, because it was the will of God, it seems that Mary Desolate does not participate in the sufferings of her Son, in the work of redemption. She appears to be separated from her Son who alone offers Himself up for everyone, including her. At the same time, however, she participates with an unimaginable intensity, one would say with an infinite intensity. It is there that she became our Mother.

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"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (Jn 12:24). Jesus had said this of Himself before the passion. If the Son of God died, it was in order to give life to many sons of God, although sons in a different manner. Mary too paid for us. And having given Jesus away, she should not receive in return people who are only partially Jesus but those who are genuinely "another Jesus," with his light and with his love. Persons who are just like him: "You loved them even as you loved me" (Jn 17:23).

Origen, who was the first to call Mary 'Mother' of others besides Jesus, says: "Mary ... had no other son except Jesus and Jesus says to His Mother: 'Behold your Son' and not 'Behold, this man is your son.' That is, He said: 'This is Jesus whom you have generated'. In fact, whoever is perfect no longer lives for himself, but Christ lives in him and, since Christ lives in him, we can say to Mary, in reference to this person: 'This is your son, Christ.'"².

¹ PIUS XII, *Enciclica Mystici Corporis*, 29th June 1943.

² See ORIGENE, *Comm. In Johannes* 1,6: PG 14,32.

In Mary's desolation, because she spiritually lost her divine maternity, she becomes, in a certain sense- or better still, she passes through the trial of being- an ordinary woman like all the others. She is no longer the person conferred with the title which expresses her reality: Mother of God. There she is only a woman, we could say, just as Jesus in His abandonment appears to be simply a man and no longer God.

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But there is a difference between these two parallel abandonments of the passion of Jesus and the passion of Mary. Jesus in His abandonment is alone; Mary is with a son. Not only this, but from the way Jesus says the words: "Woman, behold your son" (Jn 19:26) and to the disciple: "Behold your mother" (Jn 19:27), we can see at once that these words do not express just a filial love of Jesus towards His mother or a protective love towards John. No, these words have a particular tone like the words, for example, with which Jesus founded His Church. They constitute a reality. In this moment, the Church is entrusted to Mary, in the person of John, as her son, and the Church, in John, receives Mary as its Mother.

John XXIII affirms that: "It was precisely on Golgotha that the Redeemer, as his highest testament, established that his mother would also be the mother of all the redeemed: *Ecce Mater tua.*"³

Then if we read the phrase of the Gospel which follows- "And from that hour the disciple took her into his home" (Jn 19:27)- we can see the task of the Church and of every Christian: to take Mary home, to live with Mary, to go to Christ with Mary and through Mary, inasmuch as Mary is our spiritual Mother, that is, the Mother who nourishes Christians and makes them grow in their divine filiation.

On the cross, Jesus could have very well said to John: "John, with my passion I pay your ransom, I redeem you". Instead, in the moment in which He redeemed us, Jesus entrusted us to Mary. Since He entrusted us to Mary, the only way to benefit from the redemption is to do the will of Jesus, to take Mary with us and, through Mary, reach Jesus: "And John took her with him."

I believe that this idea revolutionizes our life as Christians.

We love Mary, we pray to her, we use her image to decorate our homes. We raise churches and monuments in her honor. In short, in the Catholic Church and in other Churches, she is present in the hearts of the faithful. But how many of us think of the duty to "take Mary into our homes", as John did, and to live with her so that our undernourished Christianity may be nourished by so great a mother, may be enlightened by her counsels, may be accompanied by she who is the supreme perfection of the reality of motherhood whom many, even the elderly, invoke on their deathbeds?

We need to bring about a revolution here. Our home must no longer be our home, but the home of Mary. And we must live with her in order to know how Jesus wants us to be.

³ John XXIII, general audience, 9 September 1961.