**On Mary, Model of Faith, Charity and Union with Christ**

VATICAN CITY, October 23, 2013 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org/?utm_campaign=dailyhtml&utm_medium=email&utm_source=dispatch)) - Here is the translation of the Holy Father’s continuing catechesis on the Church in the Year of Faith during his weekly General Audience at St. Peter’s Square today.

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Dear Brothers and Sisters, good morning!

Continuing the catechesis on the Church, today I would like to look at Mary as image and model of the Church. I do so taking up an expression of Vatican Council II. The Constitution Lumen Gentium says: “As Saint Ambrose already taught, the Mother of God is figure of the Church in the order of faith, of charity and of perfect union with Christ” (No. 63).

We begin with the first aspect, Mary as model of faith. In what sense does Mary represent a model for the faith of the Church? Let us think who the Virgin Mary was: a Jewish girl, who awaited with her whole heart the redemption of her people. But in the heart of that young daughter of Israel there was a secret which she herself did not yet know: in the design of God’s love she was destined to become the Mother of the Redeemer.

In the Annunciation, God’s Messenger called her “full of grace” and reveals this plan to her. Mary answers “yes” and from that moment Mary’s faith received a new light: she concentrates on Jesus, Son of God who has taken flesh from her, in which the promises are fulfilled of the whole history of salvation. Mary’s faith is the fulfillment of Israel’s faith, in Her the entire way, the entire path of that people awaiting redemption is concentrated, and in this sense it is the model of the faith of the Church, which has Christ as center, incarnation of God’s infinite love.

How did Mary live this faith? In the simplicity of the thousands of daily occupations and preoccupations of every mother, such as providing food, clothes, the care of the home … In fact this normal existence of Our Lady was the terrain where a singular relationship took place and a profound dialogue between her and God, between her and her Son. Mary’s “yes,” already perfect at the beginning, grew up to the hour of the Cross. There her maternity was dilated embracing each one of us, our life, to lead us to her Son. Mary always lived immersed in the mystery of God made man, as his first and perfect disciple, meditating everything in her heart in the light of the Holy Spirit, to understand and put into practice the whole will of God.

Let us ask ourselves: do we let ourselves be illuminated by the faith of Mary our Mother? Or do we think of her as far away, too different from us? In moments of difficulty, of trial, of darkness, do we look at her as model of trust in God, who wills always and only our good? Let us think about this, maybe it will do us well to find Mary as a model and figure of the Church in this faith that she had.

We come to the second aspect: Mary model of charity. In what way is Mary a living example of love for the Church? We think of her willingness in her assistance to her cousin Elizabeth. Visiting her, the Virgin Mary did not only take her material help, this also, but she took Jesus, who was already living in her womb. To take Jesus to that home meant to take joy, the fullness of joy. Elizabeth and Zechariah were happy because of the pregnancy that seemed impossible at their age, but it is young Mary who takes to them the fullness of joy, that which comes from Jesus and from the Holy Spirit and is expressed in gratuitous charity, in sharing, in helping one another, in understanding each other.

Our Lady also wants to bring to us, to all, the great gift that is Jesus; and with Him she brings his love, his peace, his joy. Thus the Church is like Mary, the Church is not a business, it is not a humanitarian agency, the Church is not an NGO, the Church is sent to bring Christ and his Gospel; it does not bring itself - whether it is small, large, strong, weak, the Church brings Jesus and should be like Mary when went to visit Elizabeth. What did Mary bring? Jesus. The Church brings Jesus: this is the center of the Church, to bring Jesus! If, hypothetically, the Church at one time does not bring Jesus, that would be a dead Church! The Church should bring the charity of Jesus, the love of Jesus, the charity of Jesus.

We spoke of Mary, of Jesus. And us? We that are the Church? What love do we take to others? Is it the love of Jesus that shares, that forgives, that accompanies, or is it a watered down love, like watered down wine that resembles water? Is it a strong love, or so weak that it follows sympathies, that seeks an exchange, a love with interests. Another question: does Jesus like love with  interests? No, he does not like it, because love must be free, like His. How are relations in our parishes, in our communities? Do we treat one another as brothers and sisters? Or do we judge one another, speak badly of each other, each caring for their own turf, or do we care one for another. These are questions of charity!

And, briefly, a last aspect: Mary is model of union with Christ. The life of the Holy Virgin was the life of a woman of her people: she prayed, worked, went to the synagogue … However, every action was always carried out in perfect union with Jesus. This union reached its climax on Calvary: here Mary unites herself to her Son in the martyrdom of the heart and in the offering of life to the Father for the salvation of humanity. Our Lady made her own the pain of her Son and with Him accepted the Father’s will, in that obedience that bears fruit, which gives the true victory over evil and death.

This reality that Mary teaches us is very beautiful: to be always united to Jesus. We can ask ourselves: do we remember Jesus only when something is not going well or when we are in need, or is our relationship constant, a profound friendship, also when it is a question of following him on the way of the cross?

Let us ask the Lord to give us the gift of his grace, his strength, so that in our life and in the life of every ecclesial community the model is reflected of Mary, Mother of the Church. So be it!

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[Translation by ZENIT]