



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

TO ECUADOR, BOLIVIA AND PARAGUAY

(5-13 JULY 2015)

HOLY MASS

HOMILY OF THE HOLY FATHER

Esplanade in front of the Marian Shrine of Caacupé, Paraguay

Saturday, 11 July 2015

[Multimedia]

Being here with you makes me feel at home, at the feet of our Mother, the Virgin of Miracles of Caacupé. In every shrine we, her children, encounter our Mother and are reminded that we are brothers and sisters. Shrines are places of festival, of encounter, of family. We come to present our needs. We come to give thanks, to ask forgiveness and to begin again. How many baptisms, priestly and religious vocations, engagements and marriages, have been born at the feet of our Mother! How many tearful farewells! We come bringing our lives, because here we are at home and it is wonderful to know there is someone waiting for us.

As so often in the past, we now come because we want to renew our desire to live the joy of the Gospel.

How can we forget that this shrine is a vital part of the Paraguayan people, of yourselves? You feel it, it shapes your prayers, and you sing: "Here, in your Eden of Caacupé, are your people, Virgin most pure, who offer you their love and their faith". Today we gather as the People of God, at the feet of our Mother, to offer her our love and our faith.

In the Gospel, we have just heard the greeting of the angel to Mary: *Rejoice, full of grace. The Lord is with you.* Rejoice, Mary, rejoice. Upon hearing this greeting, Mary was confused and asked

herself what it could mean. She did not fully understand what was happening. But she knew that the angel came from God and so she said yes. Mary is the Mother of Yes. Yes to God's dream, yes to God's care, yes to God's will.

It was a yes that, as we know, was not easy to live. A yes that bestowed no privileges or distinctions. Simeon told her in his prophecy: "a sword will pierce your heart" (*Lk 2:35*), and indeed it did. That is why we love her so much. We find in her a true Mother, one who helps us to keep faith and hope alive in the midst of complicated situations. Pondering Simeon's prophecy, we would do well to reflect briefly on three difficult moments in Mary's life.

1. The first moment: the birth of Jesus. There was no room for them. They had no house, no dwelling to receive her Son. There was no place where she could give birth. They had no family close by; they were alone. The only place available was a stall of animals. Surely she remembered the words of the angel: "Rejoice, Mary, the Lord is with you". She might well have asked herself: "Where is he now?".

2. The second moment: the flight to Egypt. They had to leave, to go into exile. Not only was there no room for them, no family nearby, but their lives were also in danger. They had to depart to a foreign land. They were persecuted migrants, on account of the envy and greed of the King. There too she might well have asked: "What happened to all those things promised by the angel?".

3. The third moment: Jesus' death on the cross. There can be no more difficult experience for a mother than to witness the death of her child. It is heartrending. We see Mary there, at the foot of the cross, like every mother, strong, faithful, staying with her child even to his death, death on the cross. There too she might well have asked: "What happened to all those things promised to me by the angel?". Then we see her encouraging and supporting the disciples.

We contemplate her life, and we feel understood, we feel heard. We can sit down to pray with her and use a common language in the face of the countless situations we encounter each day. We can identify with many situations in her own life. We can tell her what is happening in our lives, because she understands.

Mary is the woman of faith; she is the Mother of the Church; she believed. Her life testifies that God does not deceive us, that God does not abandon his people, even in moments or situations when it might seem that he is not there. Mary was the first of her Son's disciples and in moments of difficulty she kept alive the hope of the apostles. With probably more than one key, they were locked in the upper room, due to fear. A woman attentive to the needs of others, she could say – when it seemed like the feast and joy were at an end – "see, they have no wine" (*Jn 2:3*). She was the woman who went to stay with her cousin "about three months" (*Lk 1:56*), so that Elizabeth would not be alone as she prepared to give birth. That is our mother, so good and so kind, she who accompanies us in our lives.

We know all this from the Gospel, but we also know that in this land she is the Mother who has stood beside us in so many difficult situations. This shrine preserves and treasures the memory of a people who know that Mary is their Mother, and that she has always been at the side of her children.

Mary has always been in our hospitals, our schools and our homes. She has always sat at table in every home. She has always been part of the history of this country, making it a nation. Hers has been a discreet and silent presence, making itself felt through a statue, a holy card or a medal. Under the sign of the rosary, we know that we are never alone, that she always accompanies us.

Why? Because Mary simply wanted to be in the midst of her people, with her children, with her family. She followed Jesus always, from within the crowd. As a good Mother, she did not want to abandon her children, rather, she would always show up wherever one of her children was in need. For the simple reason that she is our Mother.

A Mother who learned, amid so many hardships, the meaning of the words: "Do not be afraid, the Lord is with you" (cf. *Lk* 1:30). A Mother who keeps saying to us: "Do whatever he tells you" (*Jn* 2:5). This is what she constantly says to us: "Do whatever he tells you". She doesn't have a plan of her own; she doesn't come to tell us something new. Rather, she prefers to remain silent, and simply accompanies our faith with her own.

You know this from experience. All of you, all Paraguayans, share in the living memory of a people who have made incarnate these words of the Gospel. Here I would like especially to mention you, the women, wives and mothers of Paraguay, who at great cost and sacrifice were able to lift up a country defeated, devastated and laid low by an abominable war. You are keepers of the memory, the lifeblood of those who rebuilt the life, faith and dignity of your people, together with Mary. You lived through many difficult situations which, in the eyes of the world, would seem to discredit all faith. Yet, inspired and sustained by the Blessed Virgin, you continued to believe, even "hoping against all hope" (*Rom* 4:18). And when all seemed to be falling apart, with Mary you said: "Let us not be afraid, the Lord is with us; he is with our people, with our families; let us do what he tells us". Then and now, you found the strength not to let this land lose its bearings. God bless your perseverance, God bless and encourage your faith, God bless the women of Paraguay, the most glorious women of America.

As a people, we have come home, to this house of all Paraguayans, to hear once more those words which are so comforting: "Rejoice, the Lord is with you". They are a summons to cherish your memory, your roots, and the many signs which you have received as a people of believers tested by trials and struggles. Yours is a faith which has become life, a life which has become hope, and a hope which leads to eminent charity. Yes, like Jesus, may you be outstanding in love. May you be bearers of this faith, this life and this hope. May you, Paraguayans, continue to build these up this country's present and future.

Gazing once more on Mary's image, I invite you to join me in saying: "Here, in your Eden of Caacupé, are your people, Virgin most pure, who offer you their love and their faith". All together: "Here, in your Eden of Caacupé, are your people, Virgin most pure, who offer you their love and their faith". Pray for us, Holy Mother of God, that we may be worthy of the promises and graces of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.