



# The Holy See

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VISIT TO THE MARIAN SHRINE OF DIVINE LOVE

*HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II*

*1 May 1979*

Today, the first day of May, the Church shows us Christ, the Son of God, at the work bench in the house of Joseph of Galilee.

Venerating this exceptional workman, the carpenter of Nazareth, the Church wishes to unite spiritually with the whole world of work, highlighting the dignity of work, and particularly physical work, and wishes to commend to God all workers and the many problems that concern them. We, too, will do so during this Sacrifice of Holy Mass.

I am happy to be in your midst, dear Brothers and Sisters, in union of faith and prayer under the gaze of the Blessed Virgin of Divine Love. From this picturesque Sanctuary, which is the heart of the Marian devotion of the diocese of Rome and surroundings, she watches in a motherly way over all the faithful who entrust themselves to her protection and custody in their pilgrimage here below.

1. On this first day of the month of May, together with you all, I, too, wished to come on pilgrimage to this blessed place to kneel at the foot of the miraculous image, which for centuries has continually dispensed graces and spiritual comfort, and, in this way, to give a solemn beginning to the Marian month, which in popular piety finds extremely noble expressions of veneration and affection for our sweet Mother. May the Christian tradition of offering flowers, small acts of sacrifice and pious resolutions to the *All Fair and All Holy Lady*, find in this Sanctuary, which rises in the midst of the Roman countryside, rich in light and greenery, the ideal point of reference in this month dedicated to her. All the more so in that her image—in which she is represented sitting on a throne, with the Child Jesus in her arms, and with the dove descending upon her as a symbol of the Holy Spirit who is precisely *Divine Love*—recalls to our minds the sweet and pure ties that unite the Virgin Mary with the Holy Spirit and with the Lord Jesus, a flower that blossomed from

her womb, in the work of our redemption: a marvellous picture already contemplated, in a lyrical invocation, by the greatest Italian poet, when he makes St Bernard exclaim:

"In thy womb was lit again the love / under whose warmth in the eternal peace / this flower has thus unfolded" (*Paradiso*, XXXIII, 7-9).

2. In this spiritual atmosphere of Marian piety, on next Sunday is celebrated the day of prayer for ecclesiastical vocations, whether priestly or simply religious. The Church gives great importance to this day, at a moment when the problem of vocations is at the centre of the deepest concerns and cares of the ecclesial apostolate. Kindly put this intention in your prayers during the whole month of May. Today, more than ever, the world needs priests and religious, Sisters, consecrated souls to meet the immense needs of men. There are children and young people who are waiting for some one to teach them the way to salvation; there are men and women, whose heavy daily work makes them feel more acutely the need of God; there are old, sick and suffering people, who are waiting for some one to bend over their tribulations and open up to them the hope of Heaven. It is a duty of the Christian people to ask God, through the intercession of Our Lady, to send workers to his harvest (cf. Mt 9:38), by making very many young people listen to his voice stimulating their consciences to supernatural values and making them understand and evaluate, in all its beauty, the gift of this call.

3. But in addition to beginning the month of May, I have come as the Bishop of Rome to visit the parish centre, which, in the shadow of the Sanctuary, carries on its pastoral activity in the midst of the surrounding people under the directives of Cardinal Poletti, my Vicar General, the Auxiliary Bishop, Monsignor Riva, and with the help of the zealous Parish Priest, Don Silla the assistant parish priests, and the Sisters, Daughters of Our Lady of Divine Love.

Dear Priests, I know your zeal and the difficulties you meet with in apostolic work owing to the distance and the isolation of the outlying suburbs and dwellings entrusted to your pastoral care. But be intrepid in the faith and in faithfulness to your ministry so as to develop more and more among souls the sense of the parish as a community of true believers; so as to promote the family apostolate, so that a house or groups of houses may become a place of evangelization, catechesis, and human advancement; and so as to dedicate due attention to the children and young people who represent the future of the Church. In this effort of yours, I express to you my encouragement and I exhort you "in the midst of the People of God which looks to Mary with immense love and hope" to have recourse in difficulties "to her with exceptional hope and love. Indeed, you must proclaim Christ who is her Son: and who will communicate to you the truth about him better than his Mother? You must nourish human hearts with Christ: and who can make you more aware of what you are doing than she who nourished him?" (cf. *Letter to Priests on the occasion of Holy Thursday*, n. 11).

4. I have already spoken of the attention this parish dedicates to children. Well, just to the

youngsters who are about to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation, I wish to address a word of sincere affection and satisfaction at the preparation that they have made to receive in a worthy way the gift of the Holy Spirit. On the day of Pentecost he was sent upon the Apostles that, in the midst of men, they should be fearless witnesses to Christ and courageous messengers of the Good News. Dear boys and girls, with the Sacrament of Confirmation you will receive the virtue of fortitude, so that you will not have to retreat before the obstacles on the path of your Christian life. Remember that the laying on of hands and the sign of the cross with the holy chrism will conform you more perfectly to Christ and give you the grace and the mandate to spread his "fragrance" among men (2 Cor 2:15).

5. And now, while we prepare to celebrate the eucharistic sacrifice, in which we greet on the altar the "true body born of the Virgin Mary", we cannot but hear in our mind the sweet expressions of the Liturgy of the Word, which exalted Mary as the "Bride adorned for her husband" (cf. Rev 21:15), the "Woman" of whom the Son of God was born (cf. Gal 4:47) and, finally, the Mother of the "Son of the Most High" (cf. Lk 1:26-38). As you see, the Blessed Virgin is bound to Jesus; she is for Jesus; she is the Mother of Jesus; she brings Jesus into the world: she is therefore at the peak of the destiny of mankind. It is she who, by virtue of the Holy Spirit, that is, of the Divine Love, by her divine motherhood makes Christ our brother; and, as she is the Mother of Christ in the flesh, so she is, by spiritual solidarity, the Mother of the Mystical Body of Christ, which we all are: she is the Mother of the Church. Therefore while the sacrifice of praise rises to the Heavenly Father, let us, as devoted sons before her Sanctuary, raise a prayer that springs from our hearts to our sweet Mother.

Hail, oh Mother, Queen of the world.

You are the Mother of fair Love

You are the Mother of Jesus, the source of all grace,  
the perfume of every virtue,  
the mirror of all purity.

You are joy in weeping, victory in battle, hope in death.

How sweet your name tastes in our mouth,  
how harmoniously it rings in our ears,  
what rapture it brings to our hearts!

You are the happiness of the suffering,  
the crown of martyrs,  
the beauty of virgins.

We beg you, guide us after this exile  
to possession of your Son, Jesus.

Amen.

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