THE WORD BECAME FLESH IN MARY'S WOMB BY THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

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In the fullness of time, the Virgin received the Word

The Blessed Mother has a precise and singular place in the plan of salvation, for “when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman” (Gal 4:4).

As the Servant of God John Paul II taught us in his Encyclical, Mother of the Redeemer (Redemptoris Mater), “This ‘fullness’ indicates the moment fixed from all eternity when the Father sent his Son ‘that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life’ (Jn. 3:16). It denotes the blessed moment when the Word that ‘was with God...became flesh and dwelt among us’ (Jn. 1:1, 14), and made himself our brother. It marks the moment when the Holy Spirit, who had already infused the fullness of grace into Mary of Nazareth, formed in her virginal womb the human nature of Christ” (no.1). In the fullness of time, Mary was definitively introduced in the Mystery of Christ and in the Mystery of the Church and the world.

This fullness of time marks the moment when God entered into human history and filled history, time, and all human realities with the power of his love and his presence. In the fullness of time, by the Incarnation of the Word of God, the human heart became the place of meeting between God and humanity. This fullness also designates the hidden beginning of the Church’s journey. In the liturgy, in the Roman Missal’s Preface for December 8, the Church salutes the Blessed Mother as “the Church’s own beginning”; for in the event of the Immaculate Conception, the Church sees herself - projected and anticipated in her most excellent and pure member. As we read in Lumen Gentium, the Church sees in Mary the fullness of the life of the Church (n. 64). As well, in Mary’s fiat - the fiat of the New Covenant -the Church’s identity as spouse and mother is prefigured.

Mary appears in the horizon of salvation history before Christ. It is a fact that when the “fullness of time” was definitively drawing near, She already existed on earth. Her life, Her heart, and Her Womb lived the Advent that initiated all Adams. In this time She was preparing the room, the space of her Tent, to become the living Ark of the Covenant, the human dwelling of God. She made room in her heart and in her Womb for Emmanuel, for the God-made-man, for the Savior of the World, for the Word Incarnate. She was on earth preparing her Womb to receive within herself the hope of humanity: the God of Love, the Word of Love…the definite hope of the human heart. She became, by her perfect reception of God’s Word, the Mother of the Word Incarnate. In her, the Incarnation - or “humanization” as John Paul II calls it (RM, 54) - of the Word, the hypostatic union of the Son of God with human nature, was accomplished and fulfilled.

“The Incarnation required the consenting acceptance of the human heart chosen to be the Mother of the Word, and only in this way do Logos and Flesh really become one” (Ratzinger, Mary: the Church at the Source, p. 83). The Womb into which the Son comes and the “flesh” that he assumes are not just any place or thing. Rather, this flesh, this soil, is a human being, an open heart. It is the Marian heart, totally available to the will of the Father and to the action of the Holy Spirit to become a Sanctuary; a dwelling Tent; the sacred space for God-made-man; the sacred soil where the seed of God can be planted.

THE WORD, THE SEED OF GOD, NEEDED A SOIL TO RECEIVE HIM

In the Gospel of St. Luke chapter 1, we read the account of the Annunciation. The angel announced the designs of God to Mary: “‘Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus’... Mary said to the angel, ‘how can this be, since I have no relations with a man?’ And the angel said to her in reply, ‘the Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you’...Mary said: ‘Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word’” (cf. Luke 1:26-38).

The Word needed a human womb where it could be enfleshed! All the works of God need a heart, a womb, a human person to receive them, to assent to them, to say, “Let it be done to me.” Grace needs to build upon nature, upon a human soil where it can be planted and nourished, where it can grow, develop and blossom. All graces must be received, treasured and be cared for. The Word, the seed, must be planted in a maternal soil. The seed must be received. The seed must be in a soil that is not dry, but fertile. “The soil must be at the service of the seed; it must contain it...The grain of wheat does not remain alone; to be fruitful, it must include the maternal mystery of the soil” (cf. Ratzinger, Mary: the Church at its Source, p.14).

In the Gospel of St. Mark (4:1-20), when Jesus spoke about the parable of the sower, He taught us about the importance of receiving His Word in a rich soil. He also warned us that the seed can be wasted or lost when it
A Virgin’s love keeps all things in her heart. St. Luke tells us that the Virgin Mary “carefully kept all these
things in her heart” (2:51). She carefully received, kept and treasured all the words, gestures, and actions of
God. Only when the Word is heard, welcomed, and guarded with loving dedication can it truly bear much fruit.

There is so much we should contemplate in the Virgin Mary’s Heart. We should contemplate our Mother in
order to imitate her, in order to dispose ourselves to be receptive to the Word. I think this description of St.
Luke about our Mother’s internal disposition of heart, as one that “carefully kept all these things,” reveals to
us the Virgin Mother’s contemplative and prayerful dimension. To keep and to guard is to take care of
something treasured; it is to preserve, to gather what is valued, and to set it in a secure place: the heart. To
keep, like the soil keeps the seed, is an attitude of the heart that is born and blossoms in prayer, in internal
recollection, and in mature reflection of the Word. It requires an openness to purification so the Word is not
diluted or accommodated to our wills.

In order to “keep” the Word one must first hear it; to hear it one must be recollected; and to be recollected
one must first have a prayerful heart - a heart with interiority, a heart that is profound and not superficial, a
heart that is responsible not careless, a heart that is serene not impulsive, a heart that is mature and not led
by any wind, a heart that does not allow itself to be shaken by anything. Loving prayer was the Virgin Mary’s
fountain of life, the strength of her heart. In prayer she learned how to be in total communion with God, how
to belong totally to Him, and how to be generously disposed to His designs.

Our Lady prayed and kept all things in her heart. In prayer she kept her heart in a constant and loving
dialogue with God’s Heart. In prayer she kept “all things” - everything that occurred. This includes even more
so what She did not comprehend, what She could not see so clearly, what seemed mysterious, what required
painful and generous assents, what seemed beyond her capacity or strength, what was beyond her
understanding, and what she needed to more deeply perceive. All of these things she kept in her heart to
immerse them in God’s love and light, through prayer…the prayer of a Virgin’s heart.

Oh what prayer was the Virgin’s prayer! Her prayer was the prayer of a pure heart that called forth - with her
human love in perfect harmony with Divine Love - the most marvelous designs of That Love. What prayer! Her
prayer was the one God needed to find in a human heart in order to bring about His plan of salvation. In her
Heart the Lord’s desires were heard, perceived, and received with perfect docility, with full openness, and
with perfect obedience. In her, the Lord’s plan could be fulfilled because her heart, matured in prayer, had
day after day carefully kept all the promises, words, gestures and deeds of God.

To pray like the Blessed Mother must be our life. We are to be receivers of the Word; therefore, we are to be
men and women of prayer, rich and fertile soil for the seed. It is in the imitation of the Virgin’s attitude of
interior recollection that our identification with Mary begins. She learned to be a daughter of the Father in
prayer; she preserved the fullness of her grace in prayer; she grew in her spousal dimension through prayer;
she prepared the Temple of Her heart and Womb in prayer; She lived her docility to the movements of the
Spirit in prayer; and in prayer, her heart was formed into a servant’s heart, totally disposed to letting the Will
of God be done in her.

Like our Blessed Mother, we must learn to keep all things with care and to protect our hearts, the soil where
the Word must be enfleshed. We must take care of the soil through internal recollection and mature
discernment. There is too much noise inside and outside of us. Too many words and too many voices speak to
our hearts and suffocate the fruitfulness of the Word of God in us. Being careful is to be responsible,
recognizing that the treasure is too valuable to leave it exposed for thieves. Being careful is to be wise enough
to recognize that the treasure placed in our hearts is a precious pearl that cannot be exchanged for just any
rock, for any thing that glitters, for any word, or for any teaching that is spoken to us. For there exist many
lights, particularly in our time, that appear to be very bright; yet, they are false or temporary imitations of the
only true treasure: the Word of God, revealed in its fullness, communicated in its integrity, and interpreted
with the totality of its content and unity by the Marian heart and womb of the Church.

“THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL COME UPON YOU AND WILL OVERSHADOW YOU”

The Incarnation required the consenting acceptance of a human heart, the rich soil (the Blessed Mother), and
the power of the Spirit to bring it about. The Incarnation required the spousal openness of the Marian heart
and the overshadowing, the covering, of the Holy Spirit. This unity of love and prayer between the Marian
heart and the Holy Spirit is a permanent, necessary condition for all the particular manifestations of God’s
presence in human history. The last chapter of the last book of Sacred Scriptures ends with a loud and powerful

His Holiness Benedict XVI has expressed many times that the great crisis facing the world and the Church today
is the “crisis of the presence of God” – in other words, the “crisis of the absence of God.” It is a culture that,
in general terms, lives without an orientation towards God and His love, a culture that wants to exclude God
from the realities of the human existence. It is a world without God - the opposite of the mystery of the
Incarnation. Pope Benedict believes that the solution for the crisis of humanity today is the encounter with the
God of love, the God who has a human face, the God that became man and has healed, redeemed and elevated
all human realities. It seems to me that we need a particular grace of “incarnation” in our historic moment -
the Marian heart in each one of the members of the Church. We must be Marian in our prayer and receptivity;
we must be open to the power of the Holy Spirit; therefore, we must call forth life; we must call forth the
particular grace of the presence of God in the midst of the shadows that have afflicted and wounded our
present civilization.
“What was accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit ‘in the fullness of time’ can only through the Spirit’s power now emerge from the memory of the Church. By his power it can be made present in the new phase of man’s history” (John Paul II, Dominum et vivificantem, 51).

I believe that at this moment we have been called by Pope Benedict XVI to place ourselves in front of God with a Marian disposition of heart - pure in its love, having a profound spirit of prayer, possessing perfect receptivity to the Word, totally availability to God’s will, carefully keeping all things. Yes, we must dispose ourselves, with all this Marian availability and receptivity, to allow the Holy Spirit to overshadow the Tent of our hearts, the Tent of the Heart of the Church. Thus, the Spirit can bring about a particular grace of enfleshment of the Child - a new powerful presence of God’s love, God’s face, God’s heart, to be manifested to a world thirsty for love, for true love: the love of God.

In His recent Apostolic Visit to the United States, Pope Benedict XVI - Peter - met with the bishops, the successors of the Apostles, in the Marian heart and womb of the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception in Washington DC. Also in this city, in the heart of our nation, he celebrated the Mass of Pentecost at Nationals Park: “The Spirit and the Bride, say Come!” I think that, with this gesture, he directed the gaze of the Church to the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 2. The Holy Father directed us to the Cenacle, the sacred place in which the apostles united with Mary in prayer and waited for the grace of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. And after the tongues of fire rested upon each and the wind filled the entire house, they were able to proclaim the Word with power. Pentecost was a moment of birth, a particular grace of continuation of the Incarnation. In prayer, with a Marian receptivity, they were overshadowed by the Power of the Spirit, and they were able to speak and utter the Word with power before many. They powerfully communicated and testified to the Word; they revealed the Word, and many accepted the message; and the Holy Father prayed in St. Patrick’s Cathedral for this grace to be renewed: “Let us implore from God the grace of a new Pentecost for the Church in America” (April 19, 2008).

May our Blessed Mother - the spouse of the Holy Spirit, the rich soil where the seed of the Word was received, the home of the Word - teach us to receive him in spirit of prayer and total availability so that the Word may be enfleshed in us and so that many in our world today will see and contemplate His glory. May we be like Mary: a living gospel, a home for the Word, a rich soil that bears abundant fruit.