

---

## 'TIS THE MONTH OF MARY!



---

Traditionally, the month of May has been consecrated to Mary, in our Church. I am well acquainted with the veneration you all have for her. Here I would like to look at a few characteristics of this important devotion, such as Pope Paul VI expressed it in one of his apostolic exhortations: Marian devotion must be grounded in Scripture, and must first be expressed in the liturgy; it must also have an ecumenical dimension, and take contemporary culture into account.

### MAJOR DIRECTIONS

This is an important teaching of Pope Paul VI, one that can shed light on our way of acting today, and which we should still offer today to those around us, in a world where we risk giving priority to alleged private revelations to the detriment of the central Gospel message. The four directions mentioned above situate in a perfect light the importance of Mary and her proper position within the whole of the Christian mystery. Marian devotion must be inspired by the Bible, and not by a few biblical quotations drawn haphazardly, but from the major themes of the Christian message. A spirituality that is grounded in that of the poor of the Lord, one that is focused on Mary's vocation and mission to fully liberate our brothers and sisters. Intimately bound to the life and mission of Jesus, the Virgin Mary can help us grasp how Jesus, by coming into the world, chose the simple life, how throughout his ministry he identified with the poor and marginal people of his day, how his main activity consisted in proclaiming the Good News to the poor, how he constantly exemplified his preferential choice for the poor, going as far as to say that all that is done to the hungry and thirsty, and to the poor is done to him. Mary, attentive who was attentive to the needs of everyone at the wedding feast at Cana, still reminds us to « *do whatever he tells you.* » [John 2:5]

### FUNDAMENTAL ARTICULATIONS

Marian devotion must find expression in the liturgy, it must be inspired, take shape and find expression within the renewed liturgy. Far from doing away with Mary's presence, liturgical renewal has allowed for a more organic way of presenting the memory of Mary within the annual cycle of the mysteries of her Son, and of emphasising the bonds uniting them. Marian devotion must maintain an ecumenical dimension. Mary is the mother of all believers, of all those who are born to filiation in Christ through the Spirit. More than anyone, Mary wholeheartedly espoused Jesus' mission to bring together in unity the scattered children of God. May I mention here that in 1988 I attended a Marian ecumenical congress, and there I was made to realise the importance of this ecumenical dimension of Marian devotion. So much love, praise, and admiration for the most holy Virgin are found among our Anglican, Orthodox, and Lutheran brothers and sisters. Far from being an obstacle to unity, true Marian devotion must take modern culture into account. On this point, Pope Paul VI noted how difficult it is to situate the image of Mary which some pious literature brings out. Some forms of devotion, while perfectly legitimate in themselves, are less adapted to people from different times and civilisations.

### IMPORTANT GUIDEPOSTS


The above seem to me four good guideposts within which to establish Marian devotion. It is not an optional devotion. It lies at the very core of the Christian mystery. There can be no Jesus without Mary, and no Mary

without Jesus. In order to point out the links between life and mission, a particular tradition wanted that any representation of Mary, whether in image or statue, always include the image of her Son Jesus. St. John Eudes, an apostle of the Virgin Mary, wrote: « Do you not know that Mary is nothing, has nothing, and can do nothing except through Jesus and in him? That it is Jesus who is all, who can do everything, and who does all things in her? We must not separate what God has so intimately joined together; whoever sees Jesus sees Mary, whoever loves Jesus loves Mary. One is not truly a Christian who does not venerate the Mother of Christ and of all the Christians. »

### **A PRAYER THAT SPEAKS VOLUMES**

The Preface for the feast of the Annunciation bids believers to give thanks always and everywhere, in our churches as well as in our homes, workplaces, leisure, and meeting places, everywhere and always. « *He came to save humankind by becoming a man himself. The Virgin Mary, receiving the angel's message in faith, conceived by the power of the Spirit and bore your Son in purest love. In Christ, the eternal truth, your promise to Israel came true. In Christ, the hope of all peoples, humankind's hope was realized beyond all expectations.* » These are the words which the liturgy of the Annunciation expresses every time we celebrate this great mystery. Let us acknowledge in our deepest selves that, at the heart of this intimacy between God and us, the greatest that can be imagined, is the great proclamation of the Word taking on the human condition. It was through her deep faith, it was through listening to the Word of God that Mary was able to give her free and full consent to the divine call. What is the quality of my readiness in responding to God's Word, today? « *I am the handmaid of the Lord,* » [Luke 1:38] Mary exclaims. Marvellous mystery that is beyond our understanding. Our personal and community history is inseparable from that of Jesus. God wants the help of a human being, a woman ever alert to His Word. God continues to request, God welcomes our collaboration in building up the Kingdom. « *Come, I need your arms to build and to love, come, I need your voice to teach and console.* » True devotion to Mary directs us to Jesus who has been among us since the day of the Annunciation, choosing the lot the poor of the world. By intensifying our Marian devotion in this manner we can join with our brothers and sisters in celebration the wonder of our salvation in Jesus, the Father's beloved Son, the Virgin Mary's child.

Have a good week!



+ François Thibodeau  
Bishop of Edmundston

« From A Bishop's Journal » (173) (14 May 1997)