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May 2008

Pope Benedict XVI

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Benedict XVI, Pope, "May 2008" (2008). *Marian Thoughts of Pope Benedict XVI*. Paper 38.
http://ecommons.udayton.edu/imri_popes_benedict_xvi/38

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The Marian Thoughts of Pope Benedict XVI

May 2008



Benedict XVI's on the Rosary--May 3, 2008

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

At the conclusion of this moment of Marian prayer, I would like to address my cordial greeting to all of you and thank you for your participation. In particular I greet Cardinal Bernard Francis Law, Archpriest of this stupendous Basilica of St. Mary Major. In Rome this is the Marian temple *par excellence*, in which the people of the City venerate the icon of Mary *Salus Populi Romani* with great affection. I gladly welcomed the invitation addressed to me to lead the Holy Rosary on the First Saturday of the month of May, according to the beautiful tradition that I have had since my childhood. In fact, in my generation's experience, the evenings of May evoke sweet memories linked to the vespertine gatherings to honor the Blessed Mother. Indeed, how is it possible to forget praying the Rosary in the parish or rather in the courtyards of the houses and in the country lanes?

Today, together we confirm that the Holy Rosary is not a pious practice banished to the past, like prayers of other times thought of with nostalgia. Instead, the Rosary is experiencing a new Springtime. Without a doubt, this is one of the most eloquent signs of love that the young generation nourish for Jesus and his Mother, Mary. In the current world, so dispersive, this prayer helps to put Christ at the centre, as the Virgin did, who meditated within all that was said about her Son, and also what he did and said. When reciting the Rosary, the important and meaningful moments of salvation history are relived. The various steps of Christ's mission are traced. With Mary the heart is oriented toward the mystery of Jesus. Christ is put at the centre of our life, of our time, of our city, through the contemplation and meditation of his holy mysteries of joy, light, sorrow and glory. May Mary help us to welcome within ourselves the grace emanating from these mysteries, so that through us we can "water" society, beginning with our daily relationships, and purifying them from so many negative forces, thus opening them to the newness of God. The Rosary, when it is prayed in an authentic way, not mechanical and superficial but profoundly, it brings, in fact, peace and reconciliation. It contains within itself the healing power of the Most Holy Name of Jesus, invoked with faith and love at the centre of each "Hail Mary".

Dear brothers and sisters, let us thank God who has allowed us to live such a beautiful hour this evening, and in the following evenings of this Marian month, even if we will be far away, each in their own family and community, may we, just the same, feel close and united in prayer. Especially in these days that prepare us for the Solemnity of Pentecost, let us

remain united with Mary, invoking for the Church a renewed effusion of the Holy Spirit. As at the origins, Mary Most Holy helps the faithful of every Christian community to form one heart and soul. I entrust to you the most urgent intentions of my ministry, the needs of the Church, the grave problems of humanity: peace in the world, unity among Christians, dialogue between all cultures. And thinking of Rome and Italy, I invite you to pray for the pastoral goals of the Diocese, and for the united development of this beloved Country. To the new Mayor of Rome, Honorable Gianni Alemanno, who I see present here, I address the wish of a fruitful service for the good of the city's entire community. To all of you gathered here and to those who are linked to us by radio and television, in particular the sick and the infirm, I gladly impart the Apostolic Blessing.

Benedict XVI's Address to Catholic Action--May 4, 2008

... Inspired by these examples of Christianity lived out, you have embarked on an extraordinary year, a year that we could qualify by holiness, in which you strive to translate the Gospel teachings into practical life. I encourage you in this resolution. Intensify your prayer, reform your conduct on the eternal values of the Gospel, **letting yourselves be guided by the Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church.** ...

On Jesus' Return to the Father--May 4, 2008

... After the Ascension, the first disciples remain together in the cenacle around the Mother of Jesus in fervent expectation of the gift of the Holy Spirit promised by Jesus (cf. Acts 1:14). On this first Sunday of May, the month of Mary, we too relive this experience, more intensely feeling Mary's spiritual presence. And today, St. Peter's Square is like a "cenacle" open to heaven, filled with the faithful, many of whom are members of Italian Catholic Action, whom I will address after the Marian prayer of the *Regina Caeli* ...

And in every age, what does man need more than a firm anchoring of his existence? Here again is the stupendous meaning of Mary's presence among us. Turning our gaze to her, like the first disciples did, we are immediately directed to the reality of Jesus: The Mother points to the Son, who is no longer among us physically, but awaits us in the Father's house.

Jesus invites us not to stand there staring into the sky, but to be joined together in prayer, to invoke the gift of the Holy Spirit. Only to those who are "reborn from above," that is, by the Spirit of God, is the entrance to the Kingdom of God opened (cf. John 3:3-5), and the first one "reborn from above" is precisely the Virgin Mary. Because of this, we turn to her in the fullness of Easter joy. ...

Let us direct, with trust, our gaze to Mary, sanctuary of the Holy Spirit, and through her, let us pray, "Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and enkindle in them the fire of your love." Amen. ...

Pope to Young French Pilgrims to Lourdes--May 8, 2008

Dear Young People,

By coming to the Marian city of Lourdes in this Jubilee Year that marks the 150th anniversary of the apparitions of the Virgin Mary to young Bernadette, you are taking part in the thanksgiving of the entire Church for the message the Virgin gave to Bernadette. With simple words, the Mother of Christ pointed out the way of spiritual renewal through the call to conversion and love of the Church.

It was in this place that the Virgin came to visit Bernadette. During your pilgrimage to Lourdes, receive this visitation of Mary, who entrusts to you today the words the Angel spoke to her on the Lord's behalf: "Hail, full of grace, you have found favor with God!" (Lk 1:30).

Indeed, through this grace Christ makes you worthy of his trust and wants you to be able to make your noblest and loftiest dreams of true happiness come true. Happiness is, first of all, a gift of God that is received by following the unexpected paths of his will. These ways are demanding; but they are also a source of deep joy. Look at Mary: invited to take a surprising and disconcerting path, her willingness makes her enter a joy that all generations will sing.

It was the secret she revealed to her cousin, Elizabeth, when she went to visit and help her: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden... he who is mighty has done great things for me" (Lk 1:47-48). May you in turn allow yourselves to be led so that the Lord may make something great of your humble life.

It is our "yes" to God that makes the source of true happiness flow: this "yes" frees the self of all that closes in on itself. It makes the poverty of our lives enter the riches and power of God's plan, but without threatening our freedom and responsibility. He opens our narrow hearts to the dimensions of divine charity which are universal. He configures our lives to the very life of Christ, by which we were marked at the moment of our Baptism. ...

Benedict XVI's Pentecost Homily--May 11, 2008

... In light of this word of life, dear brothers and sisters, may the prayer that today we address to God in union with the Virgin Mary become ever more fervent and intense. May the Virgin who listens, the Mother of the Church, obtain for our community and for all Christians a renewed outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete. "Emitte Spiritum tuum et creabuntur, et renovabis faciem terrae--Send forth your Spirit and they everything will be recreated and you will renew the face of the earth." Amen!

On Pentecost--Regina Caeli Address on May 11, 2008

... Let us ask the Virgin Mary to obtain a renewed Pentecost for the Church again today, a Pentecost that will spread in everyone the joy of living and witnessing to the Gospel. ...

With Mary, the Virgin in prayer at Pentecost, we ask the Almighty for an abundant outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of unity and concord, who inspires inspirations of peace and reconciliation in all.

Prayer of the Pope to Our Lady of Sheshan--May 16, 2008

"Virgin Most Holy, Mother of the Incarnate Word and our Mother, venerated in the Shrine of Sheshan under the title 'Help of Christians', the entire Church in China looks to you with devout affection.

We come before you today to implore your protection.

Look upon the People of God and, with a mother's care, guide them along the paths of truth and love, so that they may always be

a haven of harmonious coexistence among all citizens.

When you obediently said 'yes' in the house of Nazareth, you allowed God's eternal Son to take flesh in your virginal womb and thus to begin in history the work of our redemption. You willingly and generously co-operated in that work, allowing the sword of pain to pierce your soul, until the supreme hour of the Cross, when you kept watch on Calvary, standing beside your Son, Who died that we might live.

From that moment, you became, in a new way, the Mother of all those who receive your Son Jesus in faith and choose to follow in His footsteps by taking up His Cross.

Mother of hope, in the darkness of Holy Saturday you journeyed with unflinching trust towards the dawn of Easter. Grant that your children may discern at all times, even those that are darkest, the signs of God's loving presence.

Our Lady of Sheshan, sustain all those in China, who, amid their daily trials, continue to believe, to hope, to love. May they never be afraid to speak of Jesus to the world, and of the world to Jesus.

In the statue overlooking the Shrine you lift your Son on high, offering him to the world with open arms in a gesture of love. Help Catholics always to be credible witnesses to this love, ever clinging to the rock of Peter on which the Church is built.

Mother of China and all Asia, pray for us, now and for ever. Amen!"

Homily at Mass in Savona – May 17, 2008

... Dear friends, how can I fail to rejoice with you here in Savona for the fact that this is the very Name with which the Virgin Mary introduced herself, appearing on 18 March 1536 to a peasant, a son of this land? "Our Lady of Mercy" is the title by which she is venerated - and for some years now we have a large statue of her in the Vatican Gardens too. But Mary did not speak of herself, she never speaks of herself but always of God, and she did so with this name, so old yet

ever new: mercy, which is a synonym of love, of grace.

... It is the Father who places at our disposal what is dearest to him; the Son who, consenting to the Father, empties himself of his glory in order to give himself to us; the Spirit who leaves the peace of the divine embrace to water the deserts of humanity. For this work of his mercy, in preparing himself to take on our flesh, God chose to need a human "yes", the "yes" of a woman who would become the Mother of his Incarnate Word, Jesus, the human Face of Divine Mercy. Mary thus became and remains for ever the "Mother of Mercy" as she also made herself known here in Savona.

In the course of the Church's history, the Virgin Mary did none other than to invite her children to return to God, to entrust themselves to him in prayer, to knock with trusting insistence at the door of his merciful Heart. In truth, all he wants is to pour out into the world the superabundance of his Grace. "Mercy and not justice", Mary implored, knowing that she would certainly have been heard by her Son Jesus but also knowing of the need for the conversion of sinners' hearts. For this reason she asked for prayer and penance. Therefore, my Visit to Savona on Trinity Sunday is first of all a pilgrimage, through Mary, to the sources of faith, hope and love. It is a pilgrimage that is also a memory and a tribute to my Venerable Predecessor Pius VII, whose dramatic experience is indissolubly linked to this City and its Marian Shrine.

... The apparition of the Virgin at a tragic moment in Savona's history and the terrible experience that the Successor of Peter faced here are helpful in passing on a message of hope to the Christian generations of our time and encourage us to trust in the means of grace that the Lord makes available to us in every situation. And among these means of salvation I would like first of all to recall prayer: personal, family and community prayer. On today's Feast of the Trinity, I would like to emphasize the dimension of praise, contemplation and adoration. I am thinking of young families and I would like to ask them not to be afraid to adopt, from the first years of marriage, a simple style of domestic prayer, encouraged by the presence of small children who are often prompted to speak spontaneously to the Lord and to Our Lady. ...

Speech at Children's Hospital in Genoa – May 18, 2008

... After praying at the foot of the Madonna della Guardia in the beautiful Shrine that overlooks the City, my first Meeting is with you, in this place of suffering and hope which was inaugurated on 15 May 1938, exactly 70 years ago.

... I assure you of my remembrance in prayer and entrust you to Mary Most Holy who, as a Mother, suffered for the sufferings of her divine Son but now dwells with him in glory. I thank each one of you again for this meeting, which will remain impressed on my heart. I bless you all with affection.

Homily at End of Genoa Trip - May 18, 2008

... May the intercession of Mary Most Holy, whom the Genoese, at home and throughout the world, invoke as the Madonna della Guardia obtain this for you. With her help and that of the Holy Patrons of your beloved City and Region, may your faith and works always be in praise and glory of the Most Holy Trinity. Following the example of the Saints of this earth, be a missionary community: listening to God and at the service of men and women! Amen.

On Mary's Intercession--May 18, 2008

Dear brothers and sisters!

At the heart of my pastoral visit to Genoa, we have arrived at the customary moment for the Sunday Angelus and my thoughts naturally return to the Sanctuary of *Nostra Signora della Guardia*, where I stopped to pray this morning. Many times Pope Benedict XV, your illustrious fellow citizen, went as a pilgrim to that mountain oasis, and in the Vatican Gardens he had a reproduction made of that dear image of the *Madonna della Guardia*. And just as my venerable predecessor, John Paul II did, in his first apostolic pilgrimage to Genoa, I too wanted to begin my pastoral visit by offering homage to the heavenly Mother of God, who from the height of Mount Figogna watches over the city and all its inhabitants.

Tradition tells of how the Madonna, in her first appearance to Benedetto Pareto--who was worried about how he would go about building a church in that place so far from the city--said: "Trust in me! You will not lack the means. With my help everything will be easy. Only be firm in your will." "Trust in me!" Mary repeats this again to us today. An ancient prayer, very dear to popular tradition, has us address these words to her, that today we make our own: "Remember, O, most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who fled to thy protection, implored thy help or sought thy intercession was left unaided." ...

My gaze now turns to all of Liguria, spangled with churches and Marian shrines, placed like a crown between the sea and the mountains. With you I thank God for the robust and tenacious faith of past generations that, in the course of centuries, authored memorable passages of sanctity and human civilization. Liguria, and Genoa in particular, has always been a land open to the Mediterranean and the whole world: How many missionaries have set out from this port for the Americas and other distant lands! How many people have immigrated from here to other countries, poor perhaps in material resources, but rich in faith and human and spiritual values, which they transplanted in the places where they settled! Mary, Star of the Sea, continue to shine on Genoa! Mary, Star of Hope, continue to guide the journey of the Genovese, especially the new generations, that they find the right way in the often tempestuous sea of life!

On Romanus the Melodist--May 21, 2008

... A significant example is the *kontakion* for Holy Friday: It is a dialogue between Mary and her son that takes place on the way of the cross.

Mary says: "Where are you going, son? Why have you completed the path of your life so rapidly? / I would never have thought, my son, that I would see you like this. / And I could never have imagined that that the fury of the wicked could go so far, / laying their hands on you against all sense of justice."

Jesus responds: "Why are you crying, mother? [...] I shouldn't go? I shouldn't die? / How will I save Adam?"

Mary's son consoles his mother, but also reminds her of his role in salvation history: "Lay down, then, mother, lay down your pain: / It is not fitting for you to cry out, for you were called 'full of grace.'" (*Mary at the Foot of the Cross*, 1-2; 4-5).

... Regarding what he said about Mariology, in thanksgiving to the Virgin for the gift of poetic charism, Romanus remembers her at the end of almost all of his hymns, and he dedicated to her some of his most beautiful *kontakia*: Christmas, Annunciation, Divine Motherhood, New Eve.

Lastly, his moral teachings are related to the last judgment (*The Ten Virgins*, [II]). He takes us to this moment of truth of our lives, the appearance before the just Judge, and for this he exhorts us to conversion in penitence and fasting. The Christian should practice charity and almsgiving.

He accentuated the primacy of charity over continence in two hymns--*The Wedding at Cana* and *The Ten Virgins*. Charity is the greatest of the virtues: "Ten virgins possessed intact the virtue of virginity, / But for five of them the practice proved futile. / The others shown with their lamps of love for humanity, / And for this the bridegroom invited them in." (*The Ten Virgins*, 1).

...In today's catechesis we turn to the Christian poetry of Romanus the Melodist. Born in Syria at the end of the fifth century, Romanus received a classical education, was ordained a deacon, and settled in Constantinople. His preaching took the form of chanted metrical hymns known as "kontakia," consisting of an introduction and a series of stanzas punctuated by a refrain. Some eighty-nine of these have come down to us, and they testify to the rich theological, liturgical and devotional content of the hymnography of that time. Composed in simple language accessible to his hearers, these *kontakia* are notable for their dramatic dialogues and their use of sustained metaphors. Romanus was a catechist concerned to communicate the unity of God's saving plan revealed in Christ. His hymns, steeped in Scripture, develop the teaching of the early Councils on the divinity of the Son, the mystery of the Incarnation, the person and role of the Holy Spirit, and **the dignity of the Virgin Mary**. Romanus shows us the power of symbolic communication which, in the liturgy, joins earth to heaven and uses imagery, poetry and song to lift our minds to God's truth.

Benedict XVI's Homily on Corpus Christi – May 22, 2008

... In making our own the adoring attitude of Mary, whom we especially remember in this month of May, let us pray for ourselves and for everyone; let us pray for every person who lives in this city, that he or she may know you, O Father and the One whom you sent, Jesus Christ and thus have life in abundance. Amen.

Our Daily Bread--May 25, 2008

... Dear brothers and sisters, may the feast of *Corpus Domini* be an occasion to grow in this concrete attention to our brothers, especially the poor. May the Virgin Mary obtain this grace for us. From her, the Son of God took his flesh and blood, as we say in a celebrated Eucharistic hymn, set to music by great composers: "Ave verum corpus natum de Maria Virgine," and which concludes with the invocation: "O Jesu dulcis, o Jesu pie, o Jesu fili Mariae!"

May Mary, who, carrying Jesus in her womb, was the living "tabernacle" of the Eucharist, communicate to us her faith in the holy mystery of the Body and Blood of her divine Son, that he may truly be the center of our life. We will be gathered around her next Saturday, May 31, at 8 in the evening in St. Peter's Square for a special celebration and conclusion of the month of Mary. ...

Together with you I ask Mary, Help of Christians, Our Lady of Sheshan, to support "the efforts of those who, among their daily toil, continue to believe, to hope, to love so that they never fear to speak of Jesus to the world and of the world to Jesus," ever remaining "credible witnesses" of his love and "keeping themselves united with the rock of Peter on which the Church is built."

Papal Letter to Moscow Patriarch Alexy II--May 30, 2008

... During his time in Russia, Cardinal Kasper will visit Kazan to venerate **the icon of the Mother of God** which my beloved predecessor, Pope John Paul II, conveyed to Your Holiness through the good offices of Cardinal Kasper, who personally accompanied the sacred image back to its homeland. This icon bears a likeness to all the other venerable icons of the Mother of God, and as such offers a powerful sign of the closeness which exists between us. **It also offers an opportunity for encounter with Muslims, who show great respect for Mary, the Mother of God.** Your Holiness has been increasingly committed to dialogue with other Christians and the members of other religions, and it is with deep gratitude that I have followed with prayerful interest the signs of friendship and trust which your Church and its representatives have demonstrated in various ways.

Pope's Address to Myanmar Bishops--May 30, 2008

... Commending you to the intercession of **Mary, Queen of Apostles**, I willingly impart my Apostolic Blessing to you and to your clergy, Religious and lay faithful.

On the Trip to the UN and the US in April--May 30, 2008

... Dear brothers and sisters, I invite you to unite yourselves with me in thanksgiving for the encouraging results of this apostolic trip and in the supplication to God, **through the intercession of the Virgin Mary**, that it produces abundant fruits for the Church in the United States and in all parts of the world.

Pope's Address at End of Marian Month--May 31, 2008

... Here is a translation of the address Benedict XVI gave Saturday evening during a gathering in St. Peter's Square marking the conclusion of May, the month dedicated to the Mary.

Dear Brothers and Sisters!

We conclude the month of May with this suggestive meeting of Marian prayer. I greet you with affection and I thank you for your participation. I greet, first of all, Cardinal Angelo Comastri; along with him I also greet the other cardinals, archbishops, bishops and priests who have participated in this evening celebration.

I extend my greeting to all consecrated persons and to you, my dear lay faithful, who have desired to offer homage to the Most Holy Virgin with your presence. This day we celebrate the feast of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin and the memorial of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

All of this invites us to cast our gaze upon Mary with trust. To her, again this evening, we turn with the ancient and always relevant holy practice of the rosary. The rosary, when it is not a mechanical repetition of traditional formulas, is a biblical meditation that permits us to reflect on the events of the Lord's life in the company of the Blessed Virgin, treasuring them, as she did, in our heart.

In many Christian communities there is the beautiful custom of reciting the rosary in a more solemn way together with the family and in parishes. Now that the month is ending, this good practice should not also end; indeed it should be continued with a still greater commitment, so that, in the school of Mary, the lamp of faith may shine ever brighter in the heart of Christians and in their houses.

On today's feast of the Visitation the liturgy invites us to listen again to the passage of the Gospel of Luke that retells the journey of Mary from Nazareth to the house of her elderly cousin Elizabeth. Let us imagine the state of the Virgin after the Annunciation, when the angel left her. Mary found herself with a great mystery in her womb; she knew that something extraordinarily unique had happened; she realized that the last chapter in the history of the world's salvation had begun. But everything around her remained as it was before, and the village of Nazareth knew nothing of that which had happened to her.

Before being concerned about herself, Mary thinks rather of the elderly Elizabeth, whom she knew was already in

an advanced stage of pregnancy, and, driven by the mystery of love that she had just received into herself, she made her way "with haste" to go help Elizabeth. This is the simple and sublime greatness of Mary!

When she arrived at Elizabeth's house, something happened that no painter could ever render with the same beauty and profundity as the actual event. The interior light of the Holy Spirit enveloped them. And Elizabeth, enlightened from on high, exclaims:

"Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb! To what do I owe this visit of my Lord's mother to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the child leapt for joy in my womb. Blessed is she who believed in the fulfillment of the Lord's words" (Luke 1:42-45).

These words might seem to be excessive to us given the actual context. Elizabeth is one of the many elderly women in Israel, and Mary is an unknown girl from a remote village of Galilee. What can they be and what can they do in a world in which other persons count and other powers hold sway? Nevertheless, Mary once again stupefies us; her heart is limpid, totally open to God's light; her soul is without sin, not weighed down by pride and by egoism.

Elizabeth's words ignite a canticle of praise in her heart, which is an authentic and profound "theological" reading of history: a reading that we must continually learn from her whose faith is without shadows and without cracks. "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord". Mary acknowledges God's greatness. This is the first indispensable sentiment of faith; the sentiment that gives certainty to the human creature and liberates the creature from fear, even in the midst of history's storms.

Going beyond the surface, Mary "sees" with the eyes of faith God's work in history. For this reason she is blessed, because she believed: by faith, in fact, she welcomed the word of the Lord and conceived the incarnate Word. Her faith allowed her to see that the thrones of the powerful of this world are all provisional, while the throne of God is the only rock that does not change and does not fall. And Mary's "Magnificat", after centuries and millennia, remains the trust and the deepest interpretation of history, while the readings of the many wise persons of this world have been disproved by the facts over the course of the centuries.

Dear brothers and sisters! Let us return home with the Magnificat in our heart. Let us carry in us Mary's same sentiments of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord, her faith and her hope, her docile abandonment into the hands of divine providence. Let us imitate her example of availability and generosity in serving our brothers and sisters. In fact, we are only able to raise a canticle of praise to the Lord by welcoming God's love and making of our existence a disinterested and generous service of neighbour. May the Madonna obtain this grace for us, she who this night invites us to find refuge in her immaculate heart.