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Address by His Excellency, The Most Rev. Amleto G. Cicognani, D.D.

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PRAISE TO MARY — GRACE AND DEVOTION

Address to the Fifth Annual Convention of the Mariological Society of America by the Most Reverend Amleto G. Cicognani, D.D., Apostolic Delegate.
Washington, D. C. — January 4, 1954.

You are most welcome to this Fifth Annual Convention, you who endeavor through the Mariological Society of America to promote knowledge and love of the Mother of God, the Most Holy Mary, and to render her glory through your burning zeal and charity.

The Holy Father gloriously reigning, by his invitation to the faithful to celebrate this year the centenary of the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, has certainly proposed to make shine even more brilliantly the “*fulgens corona gloriae*” with which the Lord has adorned the brow of His most pure Mother. A fervent competition has already developed in every diocese, parish and Catholic community; and it is the duty of us priests to constitute the vanguard. It was a priest, John the Evangelist, who first received Mary as Mother and entertained toward her the very holy and delicate sentiments of a son.

With a gesture of supreme love the dying Jesus proclaimed for Mary a universal motherhood and deigned to place all of us, so to speak, on a par with Himself—He the Son of Mary, we the sons of Mary. This should suffice to compel us to turn to Jesus for inspiration in giving honor and fostering love for our common Mother, and as it were, to compete with Him.

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The Son of God, in choosing Mary to be His Mother, has given to her a “mark of divinity” and she became “Mother of God” (*Theotókos*). Interminable disputations and sharp

quarrels developed among theologians, bishops, monks and civil authorities, who sought to understand this truth and to express it in proper terms. The climax came at the Ecumenical Council of Ephesus (a. 431) where priests and people received with indescribable enthusiasm the proclamation of the dogma of Mary Mother of God. That triumph of praise has continued through the centuries, and His Holiness, Pope Pius XII, desires that in this year it may attain even greater resonance. Thus has he written in his Encyclical *Fulgens corona*: "Yet this centenary celebration should not only serve to revive Catholic faith and earnest devotion to the Mother of God in the souls of all, but Christians should also, in as far as possible, conform their lives to the image of the same Virgin." These are the objectives towards which all of us, priests in the first line, must strive. And from you, who, as members of the Mariological Society, fill the posts of sentries, a special tribute is expected.

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With Mary one enters into the unfathomable sea of divine mysteries, into the immensity of God, into the mystery of the Most Holy Trinity. For this reason the Church applies to Mary that which has been said of Divine Wisdom: "Dominus possedit me in initio viarum suarum, antequam quidquam faceret a principio. Ab aeterno ordinata sum" (*De Parabolis Solomonis*, Cap. VIII). This is not hyperbole. In fact, once God decreed to save man from the abyss into which he had fallen through original sin, at the same time He decreed that His Divine Son would become man in the womb of a woman; and He chose Mary. It can, therefore, rightly be said of her "ab aeterno ordinata sum."

With Mary one enters into a grade of sanctity that is unequaled; thus does St. Thomas express it: "Beata Virgo, ex hoc quod est Mater Dei, habet *quandam dignitatem infinitam*, ex bono infinito quod est Deus" (Ia, q. XXV, a. 6, ad 4um).

And this characteristic of a "certain infinite dignity" is reflected in the virtues of Mary; the angel addressed her as full of grace; God seems to have fallen in love with the humility of Mary for "respexit humilitatem ancillae suae"; the purity of Mary is angelic and to preserve it she would have renounced all; her maternity is outside the customary order, and St. Leo the Great in *Sermo I De Nativitate Domini*, expressed it thus: "Virgo regia Davidicae stirpis eligitur, quae sacro gravidanda foetu, divinam humanamque prolem prius conciperet mente, quam corpore."

With the dignity of Mary are joined the great mysteries: the Incarnation of the Son of God and the Divine Redemption; to it are added the great privileges: the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption of her virgin body into heaven; and finally the great functions or tasks: Coredemptrix and Mediatrix of all graces.

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This is the tribute given by Jesus to His Mother. What will ours be? We also are sons of Mary, brothers of Jesus and His confreres in the priesthood. But we are poor creatures. There is, however, a field that is shared in common which allows Mother and children to live the same life: that of *grace*; and there is one virtue that enables us to accomplish great things, *devotion*.

Grace, the participation in the life of God, is a divine sonship. Jesus procured this grace with His merits and Mary, full of grace, is its generous dispenser; through grace we live with God and with Mary. Grace is the background of Christian life and the foundation of every spiritual edifice, large and small, which may be built by us or by others. To intensify the cultivation of this field for our greater personal profit, for the benefit of those in our care, to promote the gospel, faith and virtue with greater enthusiasm and with all the means at our

disposal, this must be our tribute of love and veneration to our heavenly Mother during the present Marian Year.

Devotion is the virtue by which we become spiritually efficient, as the history of the Church demonstrates. Devotion, as you well know, does not mean sentimentality or a heavy and negative disposition. "Devotio dicitur a devovendo," writes the Angelic Doctor, "unde devoti dicuntur qui seipsos quodammodo Deo devovent, ut ei se totaliter subdant." And he illustrates this thought by noting that devotion is nothing other than "voluntas quaedam prompte tradendi se ad ea quae pertinent ad Dei famulatum" (IIa IIae, q. 82, art. 1 in corp.).

An example that explains well devotion is that of a mother entirely dedicated to her children. Devotion resides above all in the will and is, therefore, principally interior; but then it expands to the exterior with expressions of joy, acts of piety, works of charity and every other sign which tends to imitate the person or cause to which we are dedicated. It is important to note that the idea of imitation has a great part in the concept of devotion; imitation or following of Christ has produced Christianity, Christians, the Church Militant, and that civilization which is distinct from every other, Christian civilization. Christ is the model for such imitation and He in His gospel has outlined the paths for its development: faith, humility, charity, obedience, purity, the spirit of prayer, penance; along these roads one is securely with Christ and with His Mother, for she facilitates union with Christ, "ad Jesum per Mariam." Mary is the ineffable example given to us by Christ Himself.

In conclusion, during this year let us be sure that our considerations of the virtues of Mary and of everything which pertains to and is united to her are more attentive, more intense and more affectionate. The external expression of devotion will come spontaneously as the fruit from a fertile tree; it may find manifestation in prayers, triduums, novenas, aspirations,

works of charity, pilgrimages, mortifications, acts that promote individual and social welfare. But it is not necessary that I enlarge on any of these here.

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This centenary offers a propitious occasion to recall the great value of Marian liturgical prayers and to intensify our love and devotion for them.

The *Ave Maria*; in this salutation of praise to Mary the angelic world, the Old and the New Testaments and the Church meet; it is a prayer connected with our supreme spiritual interests. Be it said always fervently.

The *Litany of Loreto* is a form of intercession (λιτανεία—prayer) where the congregation unites itself to the priest and to his petitions; from the first centuries it was customary to compose such invocations of praise; as the Litany is said today it is found in documents of the sixteenth century at Loreto; then the Holy See gave the official approbation.

Those *Hymns and Antiphons*, which were always held in great honor in the past, must remain familiar, understood and appreciated for their spiritual beauty; they excite love and fidelity, feelings of penance and hope and heavenly sweetness: "Ave Maris Stella," "Salve Regina," "Tota pulchra es Maria," and "Stabat Mater dolorosa," etc.

It is not possible not to mention the *Rosary*, recommended as a daily devotion, and for the clergy this is clearly indicated in the Code of Canon Law, Canon 125, § 2; once more it is becoming the prayer of the family.

Likewise, the *Angelus*, which three times a day recalls the Incarnation of the Son of God and Mary's part in this mystery. In seminaries and in other Catholic institutions it is recited faithfully; it should be our beloved devotion to say it three times each day wherever we are, even interrupting for those few moments our work or occupation or recreation; this

the Holy Father does in the midst of audiences when he recites the *Angelus* with those present.

With these pious practices Mary has been honored throughout the centuries, and in return she has demonstrated the most generous gratitude to her children showering them with graces and favors. Let us develop these exercises of piety; let us cooperate in giving them prominence. To our zeal, to our deep love for Mary, a strong appeal is made; the Holy Father has desired that this centenary be celebrated above all because he is confident that the priests will know how to take advantage of it in their apostolates, whatever they may be, to promote always more the devotion to the Mother of God and to our Mother.

In the way of a "P.S.," among the many *desiderata* which will be voiced during the Marian Year, I take the liberty to mention this one: In the United States of America devotion to the Virgin has been cultivated in an eminent degree from the beginning; these States were at once placed under her patronage. It would certainly be an act of devout homage, a source of satisfaction to the entire country and of good example to others, to gather in one volume the innumerable and beautiful proofs of this devotion; and the publication could be entitled somewhat like this: "From Santa Maria of Columbus to the Shrine of the Immaculate." The Mariological Society might be able to take steps so that such a volume could be compiled.