

Pastoral Theme

LOURDES 2018

“Do whatever He tells you”

(Gospel of John, Chapter 2)



In Lourdes

The events in Lourdes took place 160 years ago this year. But, like the Gospel, which itself is less than 2000 years old, they are as relevant today as ever. They beckon us on to a place we have not yet reached. We need to open our hearts to the Good News, to become the contemporaries of the Gospel today. God approaches ever closer, the Kingdom of Heaven is in our midst.

2018 will be perhaps an opportunity for us to return to the roots of these events, to Mary and to Bernadette. The hubbub we experience in our own hectic lives, in our anxieties and in our concerns, blocks out the words of eternal love that passed in the silent encounter between these two young women. It will be good for us to rediscover Bernadette, the first witness of Lourdes, in whom we recognise the face of Mary and the Paschal candle illuminated with the light of the Holy Spirit. After the focus, in 2017, on the Virgin of the Magnificat, we return this year to the young Bernadette. *“Have you seen this child?”* Mgr. Laurence asked members of the Commission during the investigation into the authenticity of the events at Lourdes. Look at Bernadette and listen to her, welcome the light that shines from the dark recess of the rock, and embrace the silence that enables us to hear the Word of God.

With Bernadette, let us be attentive to the Virgin of Silence, who brings us the Word from a God of Love, our Creator and Saviour. The *‘message’* of Lourdes is none other than the Good News, announced to the poor and entrusted to them.

In the Church

2018 is a significant date for Lourdes and for the Church as a whole. In October, the Synod of Bishops will convene on the theme - *Youth, Faith and Vocational Discernment*. We are all on the path with the young people towards World Youth Day 2019 in Panama. Pope Francis has outlined a Marian path in preparation for the next World Youth Day:

- In 2017, in recalling the blessings of the past by welcoming in faith the graces received from the Father. *The Mighty One has done great things for me.*
- In 2018, in having courage for the present by engaging daily in the service of charity. *Do not be afraid, for you have found favour with God.*
- In 2019, in trusting in the future with hope. *I am the servant of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your Word.*

With the Virgin Mary, the Church directs our attention and our prayers towards the world of young people. In Lourdes, Mary, *“as young and as small as myself”*, as Bernadette said, did not proclaim from on high, but appeared from the depths of the earth. She became Bernadette’s catechist, and it was for this reason that Bernadette returned to Lourdes from Bartrès in January 1858. Mary’s method

is exactly the same as that now advocated by the Pope to bring the Gospel to the peripheries of humanity.

- Firstly, **in accompaniment**, by setting out on the path together. *“Listen to what is coming from your hearts”*, remarked His Holiness at Krakow during World Youth Day in July 2016. *“What are you seeking?”* Jesus asks the two disciples who follow him on the banks of the river Jordan. Bernadette is asked, *“Would you do me the favour of coming here?”*.¹ A path of mutual respect and confidence opens up for Bernadette, the promise of a friendship far beyond the superficial pleasures of this world. You must first acknowledge and accept your poverty. *“They have no more wine,”* says Mary during the wedding feast at Cana. Accept your poverty but do not abandon hope. Mary’s request was to Jesus. You too must enter into this inner Grotto where someone awaits you. Your poverty and your failings may become, like the Grotto of Massabielle, the place of a presence. **Listen!**

At Cana, Mary is attentive to the needs of men; she is in reality listening to God’s plan, who wishes to be reunited, through Jesus, with a humanity in decline. Mary knows that, without God, this world lacks foundation or meaning. She knows that this world is the fruit of love and that it needs to live in love to survive. Mary knows that this world, through mankind, must draw its life from the Covenant with its Creator; Mary is listening, she is always available. She is able to say, “May it be done to me according to your word”, and to say to the servants at the wedding feast: Do whatever He tells you¹

- Secondly, **in committing ourselves** with all that we have and all that we are without fear of ridicule. Mary said to the servants at the wedding feast, *“Do whatever He tells you”*. Jesus said to the servants, *“Fill these jars with water”*. Mary gives us the courage to obey the Word which echoes deep within us. Mary enables us to see that it is the Word of Eternal Life. *To whom shall we go?*
Bernadette at the Grotto crawls through the mud and digs until a spring flows *“for sinners”*. A path of grace opens to her **Be willing to serve.**

Jesus can respond to Mary’s request because she has opened herself fully to His path of trust. She is the first disciple of Jesus. As the Son trusts in the Father from whom He receives everything, Mary trusts in Jesus who has come to fulfil the will of the Father; He becomes his brothers’ servant. “I have set you an example, that you should do as I have done for you (Jn 13:15).”²

- And thirdly, **in sharing** what you have received: it is the only way to sustain it. *“Draw some out now and take it to the head waiter”*. By doing so, you will enable the guests to taste the wine and the joy of the wedding feast. They are now absorbed into the light of the Covenant, into the light of Life. The wedding feast is a symbol, it is the concrete expression of the union between God and His people, embodied in Jesus, true Man and Son of God. Mary enables us to give praise for the creation which embraces the love of its God. *“Praise to you, my Lord! ... You offer me now the wine of the wedding feast, You open my heart to joy!”*

¹In his Encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*, Pope John Paul II devoted the entire third part to the maternal mediation of Mary between God and men. Mary doesn’t add anything to the work of Jesus, but she welcomes Him in faith, and thereby enables Him to meet us. Through her prayer, her intercession, she makes us receptive to the gift of God. Refer to Appendix 1.

² Like Bernadette, we also today have a role as mediators between God’s desire and the needs of our brothers and sisters following Mary’s example. God cannot impose His love, He needs humble recipients who will welcome his grace and commit themselves throughout their lives to transmit it. Refer to Appendix 2.

On 25th March, at the Grotto, Mary finally reveals her name, *"I am the Immaculate Conception"*. I am the one who offers no resistance to the will of God. I have allowed his Word to penetrate me and become flesh in me. *"I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your Word."* Bernadette, in turn, becomes Mary's representative, the torch bearer. She is sent to the priests to tell them to build a Chapel, a place where the bread of the Word and the bread of Life will be offered. You are also invited to respond, **'Here I am, send me!'**

The Pope speaks to the young in light of the upcoming Synod: *I am reminded of the words which God spoke to Abraham, "Go from your country, your people and your father's house to the land I will show you"(Gn 12:1). These same words are also addressed to you today. These are the words of a Father who is inviting you to 'go', to set out towards a future which is unknown, but one which will surely lead to fulfilment, a future, towards which He himself will accompany you. I invite you to listen to the voice of God resounding in your hearts through the breath of the Holy Spirit...*

At Krakow, during the opening ceremony of the last World Youth Day, I repeatedly asked you: "Can we make a difference?" and all of you shouted, "yes!" That shout comes from your youthful hearts which do not tolerate injustice and which will never bend to a 'throw-away' culture, nor give in to the globalisation of indifference. Listen to this cry that rises from deep within you! Even when you feel, like the prophet Jeremiah, the inexperience of youth, God encourages you to go where He sends you: "Do not be afraid [...] for I am with you to deliver you" (Jr 1:8)

A better world is being created also thanks to your efforts, your desire to change and your generosity. Do not be afraid to listen to the Holy Spirit who suggests bold choices; do not delay when your conscience asks you to take risks to follow the Lord. This Church also wishes to listen to your voice, your reasoning, your faith, even your doubts and your criticisms. Make your voice heard, let it resonate in the communities and let it be heard by your shepherds of souls

I entrust you to Mary of Nazareth, a young person like yourselves whom God beheld lovingly so that she may take your hand and guide you to the joy of fully and generously responding to God's call with the words, "Here I am!"

The Pope speaks to each of us, not only to the young and the children; he speaks to Catechists, Chaplains and teachers, to those responsible for passing on the Good News, to those who do not wish it to be just empty rhetoric, but the Word made flesh. Perhaps particular responsibility rests with those journalists who influence the content of social media platforms visited by the young; can they provide content that gives proper nourishment for the road of life?³

Like Mary and Bernadette, are we not all, invited above all to be silent and to listen? Then the youngest, the poorest, the most frail, the Bernadettes of today will seem to us to be the privileged ones, those who are able to teach us what is important, those things invisible to the eye, but seen clearly with the heart.

³The Church learns her own role, the deep meaning of her being, from Mary.. The Church is not just a human organisation made up of people who claim to be followers of Jesus and want to continue his work. It is a family, which has a mother at its heart. The Church is birthed in the life of Jesus, the elder brother, the only Mediator between God and men. We do not broadcast a message or doctrine; the life that Mary transmits to us in the power and humility of the Spirit is infectious. Refer to Appendix 3.

On the path with my brothers

*How do I answer the constant call of the Pope to move on, to **go**? He reiterates to us the call that God made to Abraham, the call God makes to His people in Egypt to flee from slavery and set out for a new land. Mary makes the same request of Bernadette, “Would you do me the favour of coming?” What is God’s promise for me today? To what other world is He calling me?*

*There are many empty jars to fill, many layers of mud to scrape away, many hearts of stone to convert into hearts of flesh. What **choices** are available to me? What path should I follow in my life and working environment, my Church, and the world in which I live?*

*What is the **Word** that I need to get across, what mission is assigned to me, to ‘the Priests’, to those in charge, to those who are responsible today for guiding their brothers and their fellow citizens? How can I help to proclaim the Gospel and to build the ‘chapel’, the Church? What is my place among the poor, the young, those who suffer, the Bernadette’s of today, who are entrusted with the Good News of Jesus?*



Appendix 1. Pope John Paul II, Encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*, 25th March 1987

20... (Mary) was "the one who believed". But as the messianic mission of her Son grew clearer to her eyes and spirit, she herself as a mother became *ever more open to that new dimension of motherhood* which was to constitute her "part" beside her Son. Had she not said from the very beginning: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (Lk. 1:38)? Through faith Mary continued to hear and to ponder that word, in which there became ever clearer, in a way "which surpasses knowledge" (Eph. 3:19), the self-revelation of the living God. Thus, in a sense *Mary as Mother became the first "disciple" of her Son*, the first to whom he seemed to say: "Follow me," even before he addressed this call to the Apostles or to anyone else (cf. Jn. 1:43).

21. From this point of view, particularly eloquent is the passage in the *Gospel of John* which presents Mary at the wedding feast of Cana. She appears there as the Mother of Jesus at the beginning of his public life: "There was a marriage at *Cana in Galilee*, and the mother of Jesus was there; Jesus also was invited to the marriage, with his disciples" (Jn. 2:1-2). From the text, it appears that Jesus and his disciples were invited together with Mary, as if by reason of her presence at the celebration: The Son seems to have been invited because of his mother. We are familiar with the sequence of events which resulted from that invitation, that "beginning of the signs" wrought by Jesus-the water changed into wine-which prompts the Evangelist to say that Jesus "manifested his glory; and his disciples believed in him" (Jn. 2:11).

Mary is present at Cana in Galilee as the *Mother of Jesus*, and in a significant way she *contributes* to that "beginning of the signs" which reveal the messianic power of her Son. We read: "When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine.' And Jesus said to her, 'O woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come'" (Jn. 2:3-4). In John's Gospel that "hour" means the time appointed by the Father when the Son accomplishes his task and is to be glorified (cf. Jn. 7:30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 17:1; 19:27). Even though Jesus' reply to his mother sounds like a refusal (especially if we consider the blunt statement "My hour has not yet come" rather than the question), Mary nevertheless turns to the servants and says to them: "Do whatever he tells you" (Jn. 2:5). Then Jesus orders the servants to fill the stone jars with water, and the water becomes wine, better than the wine which has previously been served to the wedding guests.

Appendix 2

21... What deep understanding existed between Jesus and his mother? How can we probe the mystery of their intimate spiritual union? But the fact speaks for itself. It is certain that that event already quite clearly outlines the *new dimension*, the new meaning of *Mary's motherhood*. Her motherhood has a significance which is not exclusively contained in the words of Jesus and in the various episodes reported by the Synoptics (Lk. 11:27-28 and Lk. 8:19-21; Mt. 12:46-50; Mk. 3:31-35). In these texts Jesus means above all to contrast the motherhood resulting from the fact of birth with what this "motherhood" (and also "brotherhood") is to be in the dimension of the Kingdom of God, in the salvific radius of God's fatherhood. In John's text on the other hand, the description of the Cana event outlines what is actually manifested as a new kind of motherhood according to the spirit and not just according to the flesh, that is to say *Mary's solicitude for human beings*, her coming to them in the wide variety of their wants and needs.

At Cana in Galilee there is shown only one concrete aspect of human need, apparently a small one of little importance ("They have no wine"). But it has a symbolic value: this coming to the aid of human needs means, at the same time, bringing those needs within the radius of Christ's messianic mission

and salvific power. Thus, there is a mediation: Mary places herself between her Son and mankind in the reality of their wants, needs and sufferings. *She puts herself "in the middle," that is to say she acts as a mediatrix not as an outsider,* but in her position as mother. She knows that as such she can point out to her Son the needs of mankind, and in fact, she "has the right" to do so. Her mediation is thus in the nature of intercession: Mary "intercedes" for mankind. And that is not all. As a mother *she also wishes the messianic power of her Son to be manifested,* that salvific power of his which is meant to help man in his misfortunes, to free him from the evil which in various forms and degrees weighs heavily upon his life. Precisely as the Prophet Isaiah had foretold about the Messiah in the famous passage which Jesus quoted before his fellow townsfolk in Nazareth: "To preach good news to the poor...to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind..." (cf. Lk. 4:18).

Another essential element of Mary's maternal task is found in her words to the servants: "Do whatever he tells you." The Mother of Christ presents herself as *the spokeswoman of her Son's will,* pointing out those things which must be done so that the salvific power of the Messiah may be manifested. At Cana, thanks to the intercession of Mary and the obedience of the servants, Jesus begins "his hour." At Cana Mary appears as *believing in Jesus.* Her faith evokes his first "sign" and helps to kindle the faith of the disciples.

22. We can therefore say that in this passage of John's Gospel we find as it were a first manifestation of the truth concerning Mary's maternal care. This truth has also found expression *in the teaching of the Second Vatican Council.* It is important to note how the Council illustrates Mary's maternal role as it relates to the mediation of Christ. Thus we read: "Mary's maternal function towards mankind in no way obscures or diminishes the unique mediation of Christ, but rather shows its efficacy," because "there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5). This maternal role of Mary flows, according to God's good pleasure, "from the superabundance of the merits of Christ; it is founded on his mediation, absolutely depends on it, and draws all its efficacy from it." (Vatican II, *Lumen gentium*, n. 60). It is precisely in this sense that the episode at Cana in Galilee *offers us a sort of first announcement of Mary's mediation,* wholly oriented towards Christ and tending to the revelation of his salvific power.

From the text of John it is evident that it is a mediation which is maternal. As the Council proclaims: Mary became "a mother to us in the order of grace." This motherhood in the order of grace flows from her divine motherhood. Because she was, by the design of divine Providence, the mother who nourished the divine Redeemer, Mary became "an associate of unique nobility, and the Lord's humble handmaid," who "cooperated by her obedience, faith, hope and burning charity in the Saviour's work of restoring supernatural life to souls." (*Lumen gentium*, n. 61). And "*this maternity of Mary in the order of grace.* . .will last without interruption until the eternal fulfilment of all the elect." (n. 62).

27... Mary belongs indissolubly to the mystery of Christ, and she belongs also to the mystery of the Church from the beginning, from the day of the Church's birth. At the basis of what the Church has been from the beginning, and of what she must continually become from generation to generation, in the midst of all the nations of the earth, we find the one "who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her from the Lord" (Lk. 1:45). It is precisely Mary's faith which marks the beginning of the new and eternal Covenant of God with man in Jesus Christ; this heroic *faith* of hers "*precedes*" the apostolic *witness* of the Church, and ever remains in the Church's heart hidden like a special heritage of God's revelation. All those who from generation to generation accept the apostolic witness of the Church share in that mysterious inheritance, and *in a sense share in Mary's faith.*

Appendix 3

38. The Church knows and teaches with Saint Paul that *there is only one mediator*: "For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all" (1 Tim. 2:5-6). "The maternal role of Mary towards people in no way obscures or diminishes the unique mediation of Christ, but rather shows its power" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 60): it is mediation in Christ.

The Church knows and teaches that "*all the saving influences of the Blessed Virgin on mankind originate...from the divine pleasure*. They flow forth from *the superabundance of the merits of Christ*, rest on his mediation, depend entirely on it, and draw all their power from it. In no way do they impede the immediate union of the faithful with Christ. Rather, they foster this union. "This saving influence is sustained by the Holy Spirit, who, just as he overshadowed the Virgin Mary when he began in her the divine motherhood, in a similar way constantly sustains her solicitude for the brothers and sisters of her Son. (n. 60).

... The teaching of the Second Vatican Council presents the truth of Mary's mediation as *a sharing in the one unique source that is the mediation of Christ himself*. Thus we read: "The Church does not hesitate to profess this subordinate role of Mary. She experiences it continuously and commends it to the hearts of the faithful, so that, encouraged by this maternal help, they may more closely adhere to the Mediator and Redeemer" (n. 62). This role is at the same *time special and extraordinary*. It flows from her divine motherhood and can be understood and lived in faith only on the basis of the full truth of this motherhood. Since by virtue of divine election Mary is the earthly Mother of the Father's consubstantial Son and his "*generous companion*" in the work of redemption "she is a mother to us in the order of grace" (n. 61). This role constitutes a real dimension of her presence in the saving mystery of Christ and the Church.

39 ... Mary's motherhood, completely pervaded by her spousal attitude as the "handmaid of the Lord," constitutes the first and fundamental dimension of that mediation which the Church confesses and proclaims (n. 62) in her regard and continually "commends to the hearts of the faithful," since the Church has great trust in her. For it must be recognized that before anyone else it was God himself, the Eternal Father, *who entrusted himself to the Virgin of Nazareth*, giving her his own Son in the mystery of the Incarnation.

... For this reason Mary became not only the "nursing mother" of the Son of Man but also the "associate of unique nobility" (n. 61) of the Messiah and Redeemer.

43... It can be said that from Mary the Church also learns her own motherhood: she recognizes the maternal dimension of her vocation, which is essentially bound to her sacramental nature, in "contemplating Mary's mysterious sanctity, imitating her charity and faithfully fulfilling the Father's will" (n. 64). If the Church is the sign and instrument of intimate union with God, she is so by reason of her motherhood, because, receiving life from the Spirit, she "generates" sons and daughters of the human race to a new life in Christ. For, just as *Mary is at the service of the mystery of the Incarnation*, so the Church is always at the service of the *mystery of adoption to sonship through grace*.