

## **Pope Benedict on the Example of Mary Listening to the Word of God (Excerpts from the Apostolic Exhortation, *Verbum Domini*)**

### ***Mary, “Mother of God’s Word” and “Mother of Faith”***

The Synod Fathers declared that the basic aim of the Twelfth Assembly was “to renew the Church’s faith in the word of God”. To do so, we need to look to the one in whom the interplay between the word of God and faith was brought to perfection, that is, to the Virgin Mary, “who by her ‘yes’ to the word of the covenant and her mission, perfectly fulfills the divine vocation of humanity”. The human reality created through the word finds its most perfect image in Mary’s obedient faith. From the Annunciation to Pentecost she appears as a woman completely open to the will of God. She is the Immaculate Conception, the one whom God made “full of grace” (cf. *Lk* 1:28) and unconditionally docile to his word (cf. *Lk* 1:38). Her obedient faith shapes her life at every moment before God’s plan. A Virgin ever attentive to God’s word, she lives completely attuned to that word; she treasures in her heart the events of her Son, piecing them together as if in a single mosaic (cf. *Lk* 2:19,51).

In our day the faithful need to be helped to see more clearly the link between Mary of Nazareth and the faith-filled hearing of God’s word . . . Indeed, what the understanding of the faith has enabled us to know about Mary stands at the heart of Christian truth. The incarnation of the word cannot be conceived apart from the freedom of this young woman who by her assent decisively cooperated with the entrance of the eternal into time. Mary is the image of the Church in attentive hearing of the word of God, which took flesh in her. Mary also symbolizes openness to God and others; an active listening which interiorizes and assimilates, one in which the word becomes a way of life.

Here I would like to mention Mary’s familiarity with the word of God. This is clearly evident in the *Magnificat*. There we see in some sense how she identifies with the word, enters into it; in this marvellous canticle of faith, the Virgin sings the praises of the Lord in his own words: “The *Magnificat* – a portrait, so to speak, of her soul – is entirely woven from threads of Holy Scripture, threads drawn from the word of God. Here we see how completely at home Mary is with the word of God, with ease she moves in and out of it. She speaks and thinks with the word of God; the word of God becomes her word, and her word issues from the word of God. Here we see how her thoughts are attuned to the thoughts of God, how her will is one with the will of God. Since Mary is completely imbued with the word of

God, she is able to become the Mother of the Word Incarnate”.

Furthermore, in looking to the Mother of God, we see how God’s activity in the world always engages our freedom, because through faith the divine word transforms us. Our apostolic and pastoral work can never be effective unless we learn from Mary how to be shaped by the working of God within us: “devout and loving attention to the figure of Mary as the model and archetype of the Church’s faith is of capital importance for bringing about in our day a concrete paradigm shift in the Church’s relation with the word, both in prayerful listening and in generous commitment to mission and proclamation”.

As we contemplate in the Mother of God a life totally shaped by the word, we realize that we too are called to enter into the mystery of faith, whereby Christ comes to dwell in our lives. Every Christian believer, Saint Ambrose reminds us, in some way interiorly conceives and gives birth to the word of God: even though there is only one Mother of Christ in the flesh, in the faith Christ is the progeny of us all. Thus, what took place for Mary can daily take place in each of us, in the hearing of the word and in the celebration of the sacraments.

### ***“Mother of the Word and Mother of Joy”***

(The) close relationship between God’s word and joy is evident in the Mother of God. Let us recall the words of Saint Elizabeth: “Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord” (*Lk* 1:45). Mary is blessed because she has faith, because she believed, and in this faith she received the Word of God into her womb in order to give him to the world. The joy born of the Word can now expand to all those who, by faith, let themselves be changed by God’s word. The *Gospel of Luke* presents this mystery of hearing and joy in two texts. Jesus says: “My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it” (8:21). And in reply to a woman from the crowd who blesses the womb that bore him and the breasts that nursed him, Jesus reveals the secret of true joy: “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it!” (11:28). Jesus points out Mary’s true grandeur, making it possible for each of us to attain that blessedness which is born of the word received and put into practice. I remind all Christians that our personal and communal relationship with God depends on our growing familiarity with the word of God.