



ENCYCLICAL LETTER  
*REDEMPTORIS MATER*  
OF THE SUPREME PONTIFF  
JOHN PAUL II  
ON THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY  
IN THE LIFE  
OF THE PILGRIM CHURCH

*Venerable Brothers  
and dear Sons and Daughters,  
Health and the Apostolic Blessing.*

## INTRODUCTION

1. **T**HE MOTHER OF THE REDEEMER has a precise place in the plan of salvation, for "when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" (*Gal 4:4-6*).

With these words of the Apostle Paul, which the Second Vatican Council takes up at the beginning of its treatment of the Blessed Virgin Mary,<sup>1</sup> I too wish to begin my reflection on the role of Mary in the mystery of Christ

<sup>1</sup> Cf. SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 52 and the whole of Chapter VIII, entitled "The Role of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, in the mystery of Christ and the Church".

and on her active and exemplary presence in the life of the Church. For they are words which celebrate together the love of the Father, the mission of the Son, the gift of the Spirit, the role of the woman from whom the Redeemer was born, and our own divine filiation, in the mystery of the "fullness of time".<sup>2</sup>

This "fullness" indicates the moment fixed from all eternity when the Father sent his Son, "that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (*Jn* 3:16). It denotes the blessed moment when the Word that "was with God ... became flesh and dwelt among us" (*Jn* 1:1, 14), and made himself our brother. It marks the moment when the Holy Spirit, who had already infused the fullness of grace into Mary of Nazareth, formed in her virginal womb the human nature of Christ. This "fullness" marks the moment when, with the entrance of the eternal into time, time itself is

<sup>2</sup> The expression "fullness of time" (πλήρωμα τοῦ χρόνου) is parallel with similar expressions of Judaism both Biblical (cf. *Gen* 29:21; *1 Sam* 7:12; *Tob* 14:5) and extra-Biblical, and especially in the New Testament (cf. *Mk* 1:15; *Lk* 21:24; *Jn* 7:8; *Eph* 1:10). From the point of view of form, it means not only the conclusion of a chronological process but also and especially the coming to maturity or completion of a particularly important period, one directed towards the fulfilment of an expectation, a coming to completion which thus takes on an eschatological dimension. According to *Gal* 4:4 and its context, it is the coming of the Son of God that reveals that time has, so to speak, reached its limit. That is to say, the period marked by the promise made to Abraham and by the Law mediated by Moses has now reached its climax, in the sense that Christ fulfils the divine promise and supersedes the old law.

redeemed, and being filled with the mystery of Christ becomes definitively "salvation time". Finally, this "fullness" designates the hidden beginning of the Church's journey. In the liturgy the Church salutes Mary of Nazareth as the Church's own beginning,<sup>3</sup> for in the event of the Immaculate Conception the Church sees projected, and anticipated in her most noble member, the saving grace of Easter. And above all, in the Incarnation she encounters Christ and Mary indissolubly joined: he who is the Church's Lord and Head and she who, uttering the first *fiat* of the New Covenant, prefigures the Church's condition as spouse and mother.

2. Strengthened by the presence of Christ (cf. *Mt* 28:20), the Church journeys through time towards the consummation of the ages and goes to meet the Lord who comes. But on this journey—and I wish to make this point straight-away—she proceeds along the path already trodden by the Virgin Mary, who "*advanced in her pilgrimage of faith, and loyally persevered in her union with her Son unto the Cross*".<sup>4</sup>

I take these very rich and evocative words from the Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, which

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Roman Missal*, Preface of 8 December, Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary; SAINT AMBROSE, *De Institutione Virginis*, XV, 93-94: PL 16, 342; SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 68.

<sup>4</sup> SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 58.