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ASSUMPTION OF OUR LADY

Homily of the Right Reverend Dom Jean PATEAU
Abbot of Our Lady of Fontgombault
(Fontgombault, August 15th, 2023)

Beata, quæ credidisti.

Blessed art thou that hast believed.
(*Lk 1:45*)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,
My dearly beloved Sons,

THE GOSPEL HAS JUST revealed us the second name of Mary. On Annunciation day in Nazareth, the young virgin had heard from the angel's lips her first name, a name received from God: "Full of grace."^a In Zachary's house, she receives from Elizabeth's lips her second name: "Blessed art thou who hast believed that the words spoken to thee from the Lord would be fulfilled."

a. Lk 1:28.

What are these words which Elizabeth, enlightened by the Spirit, is referring to, if not those the angel Gabriel had pronounced a few days earlier?

Behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb and shalt bring forth a son. [...] The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee. [...] And behold thy cousin Elizabeth, she also hath conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her.^b

b. Lk 1:31-32.35-36.

The name of God's friends is not a word lasting but a fleeting moment. The word of God expresses life, as witnessed by the first verses in the Book of Genesis:

And the earth was void and empty, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the spirit of God moved over the waters. And God said: Be light made. And light was made.^a

a. *Gn 1:2-3.*

The same goes for Mary. From the very first moments in her life, the Spirit of God has moved over her life, overshadowing her. As soon as her consciousness awoke, the young girl discerned in herself, as well as in events, the presence of God. In her heart, a sort of little music kept resounding, always present, full of light, tasted in peace and trust: Mary is she who believed on Annunciation day and at the Cana wedding, at the foot of the Cross and on Easter morning. Mary is she who has always believed.

Today's feast could be construed as an invitation into a dream world. We are contemplating the woman clothed with light, who rises heavenwards borne by angels, and who, once arrived at the foot of God's throne, receives the crown of glory. We would like so much to forget everything to belong to God forever!

Yet, would we truly resemble Mary if we evaded from our history, from our own lives? The crown of glory Mary receives is the ripe fruit of a life of communion with the Lord, a life of faith. Mary allowed the gifts of God to bear fruit, and even a unique fruit, the Word of God in His human nature.

Assuredly, the divine gifts were abundant for the child of Anna and Joachim. The Immaculate Conception was the first of these gifts, an inconspicuous privilege, granted so as to prepare a dwelling worthy of Him who would one day take flesh in such a pure bosom, the Word of God. This privilege was drawn by the Father from the merits of His Son's death.

Therefore, the crown of glory received by Mary prompts us to look at another crowned One. This one isn't in heaven, but on earth. His crown isn't a crown of glory, but of derision. He has proclaimed Himself King. The crown of thorns, woven by the soldiers' hands, will through the ages bear witness to that fact. It is men who are going to crucify Him.

A miniature dating from the Middle Ages and depicting the crowning of Mary evokes the mysterious link between these two

crowns. The subject is set in the central frame. Mary, seen in profile, is being crowned by the Father. The Son, bearing a globe topped by the cross, and the Holy Spirit, under the shape of a dove, are attending. Many angels are in the background.

Yet, there is an intriguing element. Mary's eyes are not turned towards the Father, nor towards the Son. They look out of the frame, towards a frieze of vegetation, weird birds and dragons. There, an angel is standing, keeping with great care in his hands a crown of thorns against his chest. Such is the object the eyes of Mary are contemplating.

At the height of her glory, Mary doesn't forget. Crowned with a crown of glory, she remembers her Son's crown. She remembers the cross, Jesus, the good thief, Mary Magdalene. She also remembers each of us, more or less good thieves, more or less repenting Mary Magdalenes. Mary's glory is in a certain way linked with the sin of man. It took a woman saying "No", to the misfortune of all, so that another woman could say "Yes", on behalf of all those who want to follow Him whom she had begotten for our salvation.

Behind this crown of thorns, Mary's maternal eyes discern each of us, each of her children. There the third name of Mary takes shape, received at the foot of the Cross, when "Jesus, seeing His mother and the disciple standing whom He loved, said to His Mother: 'Woman, behold thy son', and to the disciple: 'Behold thy mother'."^a The *Full of grace, the woman who has always believed*, is also *the Mother of men*. In Heaven, near God, she intercedes for her children. Near God, she begets them to the life of grace.

a. *Jn* 19:26-27.

Henceforth, Mary no longer believes. She knows that each man is worth more than his own sins. She knows that it is worth hoping until the last moment, "for nothing will be impossible for God."^b

b. *Lk* 1:37.

If Mary doesn't forget the path of faith and hope she has trodden before, then we too should hope. The Nazareth Virgin invites us not to yield to a neo-Manichaeism so common in the world, and also in the Church, which raises an insuperable wall between good and evil, between righteous and wicked men; a neo-Manichaeism which shuts out mercy and shuts in the sinner

inside the infernal vortex of his own sin.

No, there are not the clean ones on one side, and the unclean on the other. There are men through whose hearts runs the border between good and evil. There are men who, under the shadow of the Spirit of God, filled with the prevenient goodness and gifts of the Father, Who is never niggardly with His grace, can make the choice of conversion, the choice of forgiveness, and thus walk, in the steps of their heavenly Mother, in faith and hope towards eternity.

Following Mary, let us ask the grace not to forget the presence of God in our time, in our lives. Let us ask the grace always to pay attention to the inner little music the angels have ceaselessly kept resounding in each man since Christmas night, *a. Lk 2:14.* “Peace on earth to men whom He loves.”^a Don’t let us forget our duty to bear witness to this little music, and to radiate the love of God, as well as the blessed hope that is dwelling in us. This crowning of glory Mary receives today from the hands of the Father, we expect that ourselves, our neighbour, all men, will receive it.

Amen, Alleluia.

