



A Place of Hope for the New Year

On the Solemnity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God

A new year is beginning, 2022, in which we need a lot of hope. And the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, is all about hope. For in Mary's womb the flesh that we men share became the flesh of God. In Mary, in her body, in the environment that she created around herself, God occurred with us.

Therefore, just as there are lands where certain fruits grow well, as oranges do in Florida, so Mary is the place where hope grows well. She is the place where waiting is easy and a downhill slope.

Mary thus belongs to the topography of hope. We think of those litanies that present Mary as a house or environment: House of gold, Tower of David, Tower of ivory, Spiritual vessel, Honorable vessel, Vessel of choice. We even find “shelter of divinity”, *hospitium deitatis* in Latin, which invites us to imagine Mary as a house to hospitably welcome a pilgrim and poor God... And it makes sense to hope “in Mary”. Why do we need to remain in this place that she opens for us?

1. Christ, the Son of God, is Born in Mary

The first answer resounds: because in that place, in Mary, God occurred and God occurs. And we remain in Mary because we cannot run the risk that God not occur in our life, that Christ the Son of God not occur.

Indeed, to miss Mary is to miss the mystery of Christ. The poet Luis Rosales wrote a long poem entitled “*La casa encendida*” (i.e. “The lit-up house”) It tells of the poet's experience when he left his native home in Granada to live in an apartment in Madrid, alone, and the apartment was deprived of warmth and light. Little by little Rosales fills the house with the memories that have enlivened his experience: those of his friends, his wife, his parents. Well, when he speaks of his mother he refers to her as “my first heart”: “we have lived the same heart for long months”.

And then Rosales describes the bond of the son with his mother, a bond that begins with the touch that makes itself felt: “I have lived hurting you... I have hurt a lot to be able to live... I continue hurting there in the center of your womb, there in the fruit of your womb and burning in it and burning with your flesh...”.

From here it is understood that Mary's heart was the first heart of Jesus. And it was a heart that never ceased to accompany him, because Jesus always had the heart of a son. Like Luis Rosales, Christ could say: “I continue to ache there in the center of your womb, and burning within your flesh”, because “I have continued to consume you, / for I have wished to keep doing so since then, / that journey of blood that pushes and wants to circulate between two hearts”. Jesus' body bore all his life the mark of the mother, the reference to the mother, witness of his origin in God the Father and witness that human life is never isolated, for “a solitary heart / is not a heart”. This relationship with the mother never ends, it is written in the depths of the son's name, he carries it in his flesh, like an open scar, but a scar from which he receives warmth and life and care.

To have flesh is to have a mother, it is to be born of a mother. As Tertullian says: “there is no flesh without birth and no birth without flesh”. Thus, by assuming flesh, the Son of God assumed a mother. Thus, Christ's humanity was never that of an isolated individual, but a flesh

open to relationship. And, therefore, open also to us. Thanks to Mary, the Incarnation is always, as St. Hilary said, “with incarnation”. And this leads us to a second hope.

2. In Mary we Become Christ

We have said that Mary is the Mother of God because in her our shared flesh became the flesh of God. In this way, Mary's motherhood is interpreted as a motherhood with respect to us. She is the place where we are sanctified and divinized, as a version of the Litany of Loreto indicates, calling Mary “*forma sanctitatis*,” the mold of holiness.

This appears in today's reading from the letter to the Galatians. It is the only passage where St. Paul refers to Mary, and he does so only in passing, saying that Jesus was born of a woman. But in this brief mention there is a lot to digest. To see this, it is enough to look at the context: “born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive sonship by adoption”. This figure of speech that Paul uses is called chiasmus, in which the members of two sequences are presented in reverse order. “Born under the law - to rescue those who were under the law” is the first sequence. “Born of woman - that we might receive sonship by adoption” is the second.

Therefore, Jesus was born of a woman, with an ordinary birth, but so that a not-so-ordinary birth might take place. St. Paul was able to draw this conclusion only because he presupposed the infancy gospels. Christ was born of a woman, but this birth was singular, because Mary was a virgin. That is, the one who was born of a woman was the Son of God, and therefore he was able to live in a new way the flesh he took from the woman. In this flesh He opened up new possibilities of relationship, so that we could live, from His flesh, as children of God. Thus Mary's motherhood is the environment of our divine filiation.

St. Irenaeus of Lyons picks up on this same idea, describing Mary's womb as “the one who regenerates us for God.” What does this mean? Mary's womb regenerates us for God because Mary has generated God in the flesh. And every time we receive the flesh of Jesus, in order to be configured to it, Mary's motherhood is inscribed in that flesh, which reaches us. When we receive communion, we do not receive the body of Jesus in isolation, but the body born of Mary. If to have flesh is to have a mother, by assimilating the flesh of Christ we are assimilating in us the mother of Christ, we are receiving the seal of Mary's maternity.

In Mary, then, what, according to the theologian Giuseppe Angelini, can be said to every mother who is expecting a child is fully realized: “You can only be a good mother to this child who will be born if you have first adopted all the children of the world. Only in this way will you have accepted to receive the child as he comes, not something made by you, but someone entrusted to you”. In Mary this is fully fulfilled because it is fulfilled not only as a disposition to welcome every son, but as a reality: by accepting the son of God in her womb, she accepted all of us who are sons in the Son.

3. In Mary We are Born Together as the Body of Christ.

And so there is a third reason for remaining in her: that in Mary we are born together to God. What Mary generates is an atmosphere of hope, where we can hope, not only for the isolated individual, but for the communion, for us. Mary, being the mother of God, is the mother of our common good. She is the Mother of that good which is the ultimate good that we pursue together and which we can only attain together.

We have seen the litanies that speak of Mary as a place. The mother is, first of all, a house. The house is like the womb, a place where the person is generated by educating her. The difference is that, while in the womb we are alone, not so in the house. In the house the mother does not generate only isolated people, but the relationships between them, between

the siblings. The poem "*La casa encendida*" inspires us again when Luis Rosales describes the home as the place where "the heartbeats have the same letters as the word brother."

In addition, we also call Mary a refuge, and here we have the invocation "tower of David" (Song 4:4), a fortress that protects our common life and rescues it from every evil that afflicts our relationships. An old Spanish carol says: "Virgin, thou art our mother; she who ate the fruit / I call stepmother." The verse is not very flattering to Eve, but we feel its sting even more if we apply it to our closer ancestors. Shall we call our grandmothers or our own mother stepmothers, because they also bit the fruit? Yes and no. That is, if it had not been for Mary, they would all be stepmothers. They are mothers, and not stepmothers, thanks to Mary. We owe it to Mary to recover motherhood as a source of benefits. Also, thanks to Mary's divine motherhood, there are no longer only half-brothers, but brothers.

Finally, the mother also opens the space of the city, because she teaches us the common language of men, mother tongue and mother tongue. Dante represented the perfect city, the holy Church of heaven, as an enormous rose, which is the archetype of beauty and perfection. And the poet relates the birth of this rose to the womb of Mary: "Love, in your womb, was fanned to fire again. / And here, in this eternal peace, the warmth of love/ has brought the Rose to germinate and bloom." In this way Mary gives us the key to every mission of the Church, which is a generation of life and of life together. The Christian mission is not a simple imperative, something that must be done because it is commanded. From Mary, from the common good that she harbors, the meaning of mission changes. For the mission springs from the shared life that is carried within and that increases the more it expands, and that is why the mission is always joyful.

Let us conclude with an image. El Greco, in his "The Burial of the Count of Orgaz", has represented Mary in the celestial womb where man is born for heaven, where the eternal is generated. What in the painting happens after death anticipates our today. Mary is the opposite of what is called the comfort zone (that is, our safe zone, where things are under control, but also where fertility is reduced or suffocated). For to enter into Mary is to enter into that place where we are thrown beyond ourselves, to find God with us, to generate God in us.

For all these reasons, Mary is a living source of hope. Which is summed up in the motto: "In Mary, Christ," which we can break down: "In Mary, we meet Christ! In Mary, we become Christ! In Mary, together, we become the body of Christ!"