

Transcription

(For simultaneous translation)

Castel Gandolfo, 28 April 2003

## **Chiara to the Marian Congress: “Contemplating Christ Through Mary’s Eyes”**

### ***Mary in the Focolare Movement or Work of Mary and the Rosary***

**Chiara:** Your Eminencies, Your Excellencies, All who are present here and all who are following us through the media. The title of my talk is “Mary in the Focolare Movement or Work of Mary and the Rosary”.

We have just listened to the message that the Holy Father handed to me on October 16<sup>th</sup>, ideally entrusting to all of us, focolarini, the task of cooperating to highlight and spread the rosary during this year dedicated to it. We have also listened to a hymn to Mary about whom “we will never be able to say enough”.

Now someone might ask us: what were the feelings of the members of the Movement, and particularly yours, in the face of this task, of this privilege? First of all, ever renewed gratitude toward the Holy Father who wished to add still another sign of trust in our Movement. And, of course, prompt adherence to this specific will of his. At the same time, an ardent desire in my heart: to know what might be the relationship between an ecclesial reality like ours, centered on living and radiating the Gospel and in this way cooperating in the Church towards the fulfillment of Jesus’ Testament, that is, unity, and spreading this glorious devotion to Mary.

Although we, I had always loved Mary, I vaguely recalled that she became present in a precise moment at the beginning of our Movement. It was when the Holy Spirit, through a new charism of his, began to inundate us with his light. But I did not know anything more. I sensed, however, that I had to refocus on that moment in order to have the answer, on that very moment.

Then, in a totally unexpected way, from the enormous stack of papers and documents of our history, I was handed on that very day pages I had written in the 1950’s which explained something to me.

It began with the words of the melody we just listened to here, and it continued, in the form of a diary, with the following words which moved me: “One day, beneath an atrocious bombing, the war was raging, face-down on the ground and covered with the thick dust that filled the air, I picked myself up almost as if miraculously preserved. Calm and filled with peace in the midst of the cries of the people around me, I realized that in those moments of danger (to my life) I had experienced a deep suffering: that of never again being able to say the ‘Hail Mary’.

“At that moment I hadn’t fully understood the meaning of those words. Later on, as the beads of a living rosary (referring to the first group of focolarine) were unraveling and God began to pick one by one, we could say, the components of this Work which is now all of Mary, I understood that lament.

“Perhaps it was in the plans of God that praise be given to her during our times in which the Popes have set the choicest jewels in her crown: the proclamation of Mary as the Immaculate Conception, as the Assumed into heaven, as Queen of heaven and earth! But the “Hail Mary” I desired to say had to be made up of living words, of people who, almost like other little Marys, would give Love to the world.”

The beads of a living rosary!

Living words!

Other little Marys!

This was the light I was waiting for. This was, and is, the basic relationship between our Movement and the rosary.

For us, this is the only way that also saying the rosary would have its full value, because true, authentic, appreciated praise can best be given by those who seek to imitate the person being praised.

Saying the “Hail Mary” for us, for me, would mean building up a living, spiritual shrine to Mary, to her glory, a glory which she, “transparency of God”, always directs to him. And because our Movement had to be, first of all, a living rosary, a supernatural instinct prompted us to entitle it: “Work of Mary”.

After that first manifestation of Mary, for a short time, we did not know anything else about her. We thought that she was acting with us as she did with the early Church: she did not emerge so as to give full relief to Jesus. We compared her to a gate, the gate which leads to Christ “and a gate,” we used to say, “is not such if it does not open and allow you to pass through.” Only later did we understand that what happened in the nascent Movement in the years that followed could not have taken place without her influence, without her presence, even though it was a hidden presence.

Actually, the new lifestyle, the “spirituality of unity”, whose main points the Holy Spirit had been engraving in our hearts one by one with letters of fire, appeared to us almost as the milk of Mary which nourished our souls. Because those truths which we took from the Gospel and lived: God Love, the will of God, the Word, love of neighbor, Jesus crucified and forsaken, unity, all interlinked with one another, would make it possible for us, through mutual love, to “generate”<sup>1</sup> – using an expression of Paul VI – Jesus among us: “For where two or three are gathered together in my name (in my love, the Church Fathers explain) there am I in the midst of them” (Mt 18:20).

Jesus spiritually present among us! The same Jesus who had received his physical life from Mary. For this reason, we assumed also during that period that along with the Holy Spirit, Mary too was present. The Council affirms: “Only Mary and the Holy Spirit are able to give life to Christ and make him grow in the heart of the faithful.”<sup>2</sup>

But when the moment came for her official entry, so to speak, into our Movement, she showed herself – or better still, God revealed her to us as being great – in proportion to how much she had known how to remain hidden before. Great, great. It was in 1949, during a period of special graces, (perhaps an “illuminative” period of our history), that God wished to speak something of Mary to our hearts. We understood, for example, that she, set like a jewel into the Most Holy Trinity as a rare and unique creature, was all word of God, all clothed with the word of God. We were so deeply struck by this understanding that we felt that only the angels could attempt to stammer something about her.

In fact, if the Word, the Son of God, is the splendor of the Father, Mary, whose very substance was the word of God, appeared to be of incomparable beauty. And the fact that Mary is all word of God is evidenced by the *Magnificat*, which owes its originality to being a sequence of phrases from the Scriptures: the Virgin was so nourished with Scripture as to be accustomed to using its words.

It became clear to us that what characterized Mary – although in her unique perfection – would also have to be what distinguishes every Christian: being another Christ, the Truth, the Word, with the personality that God has given him or her.

*VIDEO end of Part 1 – start of Part 2*

This new understanding that we had of Mary strongly attracted us to her and we felt a very new love for her. We had a new love for Mary, and she responded to this love in an evangelical way, manifesting to us even more clearly what made her great beyond words: her being the Mother of God. Theotókos. Thus she was not just, as we thought before, the pure young girl of Nazareth, the most beautiful creature in the world, the heart that contains and surpasses all the loves of all the mothers on earth, but she was the Mother of God. The slightest intuition of this mystery sufficed to immerse us in mute adoration and acts of thanksgiving to God for having worked so much in one human being.

It seemed, in fact, that with this new understanding of Mary, she had revealed to us a dimension of hers which had been almost completely unknown to us. Previously, to give a comparison, we used to think of Mary’s relationship to Christ and the saints as being like that of the moon in the sky (Mary)

<sup>1</sup> See Paul VI, *Discourse to the Parish of Santa Maria Consolatrice* (Rome, March 1, 1964. In: *Insegnamenti di Paolo VI*, II/1964. Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1965, p.1073.

<sup>2</sup> *Lumen Gentium* 65: *Enchiridion Vaticanum* 1,441.

beside the sun (Christ) and the stars (the saints). Now the picture changed. The Mother of God, like an immense blue sky, embraced the sun itself, God himself.

God, in his unlimited love for this privileged creature, had made himself, in a certain sense, “small” before her.<sup>3</sup> St. Paul, speaking of Jesus, says that he “emptied himself” (Phil 2:7). And this began in the womb of Mary.

I remember that having understood at least a little of her greatness made us feel like crying out to everyone: only now have we come to know Mary!

We have always felt that seeing Mary as word of God is charged with consequences, for example, in the ecumenical field. What a joy it is for our Evangelical brothers and sisters, linked to the Movement, to discover her in this way: the “personification” of Scriptures whose value they greatly emphasize. At the same time, if Mary is word of God, everyone can understand that there are Christians who see her, venerate her and follow her as their leader, after Christ, who sing to her, paint her, dedicate lines of poetry to her.

However, if Mary is also the Mother of God, she is certainly quite different from any other Christian. If God himself has made her so beautiful that he delights in her and exalts her, as affirmed by the words of the angel: “Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you!” (Lk 1:28), then indeed she is entitled to a special place. It is understandable, therefore, that there are images of Mary in the Catholic and Orthodox Churches. In this light, every expression of honor and affection offered to Mary becomes meaningful.

There is another aspect of Mary that has interested the Movement from its birth. It is the Virgin in her relationship with suffering: the Sorrowful Mother, as she is popularly called. Mary Desolate for us. Desolate, a name which recalls the solitude she often had to face in life, especially at the foot of the cross, always “losing” everything in order to make herself one with the will of God.

When Jesus, pointing to John, said to Mary: “Woman, this is your son” (Jn 19:26), she went through the terrible trial of losing Jesus, not only because he was dying, but also because another person was taking his place: a terrible suffering for the heart of a mother. She said a “yes” which was different from the first one. With her first “yes”, at the Annunciation, Mary who was consecrated – we believe ever since she was a child – as a virgin to God for all her life, seemed to have to change her plans. She will become the mother of Jesus while remaining a virgin.

With her second “yes” at the foot of the cross, she gave up Jesus, and only in this way did she become the mother of everyone, did she acquire the maternity of a countless number of persons. Pius XII states: “She offered him (Jesus) on Golgotha to the Eternal Father... *and her mother's rights and mother's love were included in the holocaust.* Thus she who corporally was the mother of our Head... became spiritually the mother of all his members.”<sup>4</sup>

I remember that after these illuminations – if we can call them such – because of the love she had shown us and the increased love in our hearts for her, what St. Theresa of Lisieux said when still a child happened to us: “I understood... that I was her daughter and so I could only call her ‘Mother’.”<sup>5</sup>

We realized in an unforgettable way that Mary was our Mother. Indeed, this conviction, which was born then and there, was so strong that we felt that Mary “... was our mother more than our own mothers.”<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> St. Ephraem Syrus in his Hymn on the Nativity writes: “In the womb of Mary he who is equal to his Father from all eternity becomes a child: he gives us his greatness and takes our smallness” (in *Corpus Scriptorum Cristianorum Orientalium*, 187, p.180).

<sup>4</sup> Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis*, June 29, 1943, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, 35 (1943), pp.247-248; See *Lumen Gentium* 58 e nota 11, in *Enchiridion Vaticanum*, 1,432. John XXIII affirms that “It was precisely on Golgotha that the Redeemer... established as his supreme testament that his mother would also be the mother of all the redeemed: ‘*Ecce Mater tua*’.” (John XXIII, General Audience, September 9, 1961, in “*L’Osservatore Romano*” September 10, 1961).

<sup>5</sup> Teresa Di Lisieux, *Storia di un Anima*, Ms A, 56v°-57r°, in *Opere Complete*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana 1977, p.166.

<sup>6</sup> Giovanni il Geometra, *Discorso sull’Assunzione*, n.66, in A. Wenger, *L’assomption de la T.S. Vierge dans la tradition byzantine du V° au X° siècle*, Paris 1955, pp.410-412.

Mary was a wellspring of inspirations in our life which I can only list here. For instance, when we intuited the meaning of a name attributed to her, Mother of Beautiful Love, we understood that she wished to share with us too something of her maternity of love. Or when we saw her as the handmaid of God, a humble, meditative and adoring creature in front of him. Or when we seemed to gain a better insight into how she loved the Father, having been taught to love the Father by the Son. How she was *the Daughter, par excellence*, “the favorite daughter of the Father”, as the Council calls her<sup>7</sup>, extraordinarily beautiful, the Woman of love, as we felt like calling her.

We clearly understood then that Mary was our *example*, our *prototype*. She was our model. She was what we should be, whereas we could see that each one of us had the potential to be another Mary. Therefore, each one of us saw herself as having the possibility of becoming a little Mary, similar to her, like a daughter that has the features *only* of her mother. This conviction was confirmed by a singular episode.

One day, years later, prompted, I believe by the Spirit, I entered a church, and with my heart filled with confidence, I prayed to Jesus. I asked him why he who has remained on earth, in every corner of the world through the most holy Eucharist, has not also found a way to keep his mother here to help us in the journey of life. From the tabernacle, in silence, he seemed to answer me: “I didn’t leave her because I want to see her again in you (in all of you). Even though you are not immaculate, my love will purify you, it will virginize you. You will open your arms and hearts as mothers to humanity, which as then, is thirsty for God and for his mother. Now it is up to you to soothe the sufferings, to heal the wounds, to dry the tears. Sing the litanies and try to reflect them.”

I remember having asked Mary one day to form a family here on earth of sons and daughters who would be *like her*, with the same spiritual features. I wonder now if that prayer, perhaps suggested by Mary herself, might have prompted her to look at us in spite of our total unworthiness. Our Statutes, approved by the Church in 1990, would affirm this. They state that the Work of Mary “wishes to be – in as far as possible – a presence of Mary in the world and, as it were, a continuation of her” (Art. 2). **(Applause)**

(...)

This then, very briefly, are some ideas on Mary, as she is viewed in her Work, the Work of Mary, the living rosary we are called to form. A living rosary. Ever since our Movement appeared on earth in 1943, it has never ceased to nourish itself, to sustain itself, to mark out its journey with the recitation of the rosary, with its mysteries of joy, sorrow and glory. Now the luminous mysteries have been added, and the contemplation of Christ with the eyes of Mary is fuller, more beautiful, more complete.

Thank you, Holy Father, for what you have done for this glorious prayer to Mary.

And to you, my mother, our mother, the mother of all men and women on earth, allow me to tell you once again: “If heaven itself seems to pour forth and envelop us at times while we are reciting the rosary, causing the entire world, beautiful though it may be, to appear distant and dim in comparison, what will it be like to meet you, Mary?” **(Applause)**

<sup>7</sup>*Lumen Gentium* 53, in *Enchiridion Vaticanum*, 1,427.