

# Marialis Cultus

## A Summary of the Apostolic Exhortation on Mary

On 21 March an Apostolic Exhortation of Paul VI, "Marialis Cultus" was presented to journalists in the Press Office of the Holy See.

We offer our readers a summary of the document.

The Apostolic Exhortation continues the work that has been done in the years since the Council to restore and increase Christian worship. Devotion to the Mother of Our Lord, whom to use the words of the Council "the Church honours with special love" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 103) forms a necessary and qualifying part of this worship. In fact there must be a special devotion to the Virgin Mary corresponding to the unique part played by her in the history of salvation. For this reason the Council "admonishes all the sons of the Church that the cult, especially the liturgical cult, of the Blessed Virgin be generously fostered. It charges that practices and exercises of devotion towards her be treasured as recommended by the teaching authority of the Church in the course of centuries" (*Lumen Gentium*, 67).

In recent years, however, as a result of the changes which have taken place in social habits and, partially, also in the manner of expressing religious feeling, certain ways of expressing personal and communal devotion to the Mother of the Lord have come to seem unsuited to the feelings of the people of today and insufficient for expressing fully the doctrine concerning Mary's role in the work of salvation and in the life of the Church. In addition, these practices were not always in conformity with the basic lines of the liturgical reform.

This has given rise in some places to an inconsistency between, on the one hand, the richness of conciliar doctrine and the exhortation to strengthen public worship and, on the other hand, the actual devotional practice. This has created a certain impression of disorientation and crisis in devotion to the Blessed Virgin. In other places, however, there is evidence of a sincere effort to renew devotion to the Virgin Mary in accordance with the Church's age-old tradition and a true acceptance of the directives of the Second Vatican Council. In this situation the Pope has considered it opportune to deal with certain themes related to devotion to the Virgin Mary so that all doubts may be dispelled and this devotion may be consolidated in the souls of the faithful and develop in harmony not only with tradition but also with the liturgical reform, the development of doctrine and with the religious sensibilities of the people of today.

The document has three parts:

- 1) devotion to the Virgin Mary in the reformed liturgy;
- 2) orientations for the renewal of Marian devotion;
- 3) suggestions regarding the recitation of the Angelus and the Rosary.

### PART ONE

This part is divided into two sections. In the first section the Marian aspect of the reformed liturgical books is examined. These books, far from weakening devotion to the Virgin Mary, as some have affirmed, rather favour its development, because they integrate it more profoundly and organically into the celebration of the mysteries of Christ. They likewise highlight the ecclesial

value of this devotion and recognize its privileged place in Christian worship. In the reformed liturgy, veneration of the Virgin Mary is expressed in formulas rich in content and not infrequently endowed with affectionate lyricism. But this veneration does not appear as an end in itself, springing in fact from contemplation of the bond which unites Mary to Christ and of her manifold mission in the Church. It leads to the glorification of God for the wonders he has worked in her (cf. Lk. 1:49) and to an active involvement in the Christian life.

The document passes in rapid review the main books of the renewed Roman liturgy, noting the place that the Blessed Virgin occupies in them.

First and foremost it considers the **Roman Calendar**, from which there emerges the constant presence of the Blessed Virgin during the liturgical year: the solemnities of the Mother of God, of the Annunciation of the Lord, of the Assumption and of the Immaculate Conception; the Marian characteristic of the seasons of Advent and Christmas, other feasts and commemorations of the Blessed Virgin, including the ancient commemoration of Our Lady on Saturday; to these must be added the celebrations of the Blessed Virgin which are proper to the calendars of the various nations and dioceses.

The document then examines the two basic books for the celebration of the Eucharist: the **Roman Missal** and the **Lectio**. In the former are found all the great themes of doctrine and Marian devotion handed down by Tradition, and other themes which have in a special way engaged attention in modern times, such as the theme of the relationship between Mary and the Church. In the **Lectio** there is found a notable increase

in the number of biblical readings of Marian significance. These occur not only in Masses in honour of Our Lady, but also in various Sunday Masses and in those which accompany the celebration of certain sacraments. The document then draws attention to the **Liturgy of the Hours**, where an important place is given to the Virgin Mary in the hymns, readings and formulas of intercession. Finally it mentions other liturgical books, the Rites of Baptism, of Religious Profession, of the Anointing of the Sick, etc. These illustrate clearly how the Church has recourse to the Virgin Mary in important moments of the Christian life.

In the second section the document considers the exemplary value of Mary for the entire Church and for each of the faithful in the exercise of worship. Mary is in fact the Virgin who listens to the word of God who prays to and praises the Lord who transmits life as a mother and offers the son, associating herself with his sacrifice. The Church listens to the word of God in the **Liturgy of the Word**, unceasingly praises the Lord and intercedes for the salvation of the world, gives life through the sacraments, and calls the faithful together to offer the Eucharistic Sacrifice, the memorial of the death and resurrection of Christ.

### PART TWO

As has been mentioned, the Council desires that side-by-side with liturgical worship, other forms of devotion should flourish above all those recommended by the Magisterium (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 67), or composed by order of the bishops or in accordance with legitimate tradition (cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 13).

Nevertheless, some forms of devotion appear at times to need

revising, in order to replace out-of-date elements, to strengthen the perennial elements and to incorporate doctrinal data acquired by the progress of theological studies and put forward by the Magisterium. The Holy Father wishes that this revision should respect tradition and be open to receive the legitimate aspirations of the people of today. The document provides some orientations towards this end. These help to ensure that devotion to the Blessed Virgin:

— should make clear the deep **Christological** orientation, namely the indissoluble connection and essential relationship of the Blessed Virgin to the Divine Saviour;

— should give sufficient emphasis to the **pneumatological** aspect, that is, the relationship of the Blessed Virgin with the Holy Spirit;

— should express the **ecclesiological** sense, that is, the place which Mary occupies in the Communion of Saints;

— should reinforce the **biblical** content, drawing from Sacred Scripture inspiration, themes and strength for its forms of expression;

— should show harmony with the **liturgical** renewal, taking into account the styles and rhythms of the Sacred Liturgy;

— should reflect the aspirations of the **ecumenical** movement, itself becoming an instrument for Christian Unity;

— should take into account present conditions of life in society, especially of women in the domestic, social, political and cultural fields.

The application of these directives will render devotion to the Blessed Virgin ever more solid

and pure. The figure of Mary, the first and the most perfect disciple of the Lord, will be able to be put forward with more vigour for the imitation of the people of the present time, notwithstanding the changed socio-cultural conditions, because the essential reasons for which the Blessed Virgin constitutes a valid model for the Christian people — acceptance of the word of God, fidelity to her mission, helpful charity and practical collaboration in the work of salvation — have a universal and permanent character. The directives of the document are of a "positive" type. They will be accompanied, according to conditions, by a discreet or vigorous effort to wipe out the defects which in some area have crept into devotion to the Mother of God, defects such as vain credulity, sterile sentimentality, narrow-mindedness, exaggeration of the content of the devotion and recourse to legendary elements.

### PART THREE

The task of renewing pious exercises in honour of the Blessed Virgin or of creating new ones, on the basis of the criteria indicated above, belongs to the Apostolic See, the episcopal conferences, the bishops, the religious congregations and to every legitimate Christian community, depending upon the diffusion, scope and origin of the devotions in question. The Pope dwells in particular upon two pious exercises with which the Apostolic See has concerned itself on various occasions: the Angelus and the Rosary.

With regard to the Angelus, the document contains an earnest exhortation to continue its recitation, even in the altered social conditions and surroundings.

The Rosary is dealt with at greater length. The document recalls the scientific and pastoral research carried out in recent years, from which the primary characteristics of the Rosary have emerged more clearly: first, its **Evangelical** and **Christological** nature, since the Rosary draws the mysteries it contemplates from the Gospel, i.e. the salvific events of the life of the Saviour; and secondly, its elements of **praise, petition and contemplation**. Without the last-mentioned element especially the Rosary would be like a body without a soul, and would run the risk of becoming a mechanical repetition of formulas. While stressing the value of this devotion, the Holy Father sets forth once more its principal features as tradition has transmitted them to us. Other pious exercises can take their inspiration from the Rosary and develop one or other of its elements, in order that the Rosary's spiritual riches may be better understood and its recitation given new strength. Some have asked that the Rosary be declared a liturgical prayer. It must be recognized that in many aspects the Rosary harmonizes very well with the Liturgy, but it must not be confused with the Liturgy nor must it supplant it, as has sometimes happened in the past. The Rosary must in fact keep its nature as a pious exercise, and one which can help to make the Liturgy better understood and lived.

Finally, the Pope explains the value of the recitation of the Rosary in the family. Being a sort of "domestic Church," the family takes on when it prays together, its essential function as a praying community, and finds in Mary its most shining example.



Sculpture by Hans Knesl.