

# Exult in the 'Mother of the Church'

Following are excerpts from Pope John Paul's homily on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, Dec. 8, 1978.

The Constitution "Lumen Gentium" is the principal document of the (Second Vatican) Council, the "key" document of the Church of our time, the cornerstone of the whole work of renewal which Vatican II undertook and of which it gave the directives.



The last chapter of this constitution bears the title, "The role of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, in the Mystery of Christ and the Church."

Paul VI, speaking in St. Peter's Basilica (on Nov. 21, 1964), with his thought fixed on the importance of the doctrine expressed in the last chapter of the constitution, called Mary "Mother of the Church" for the first time.

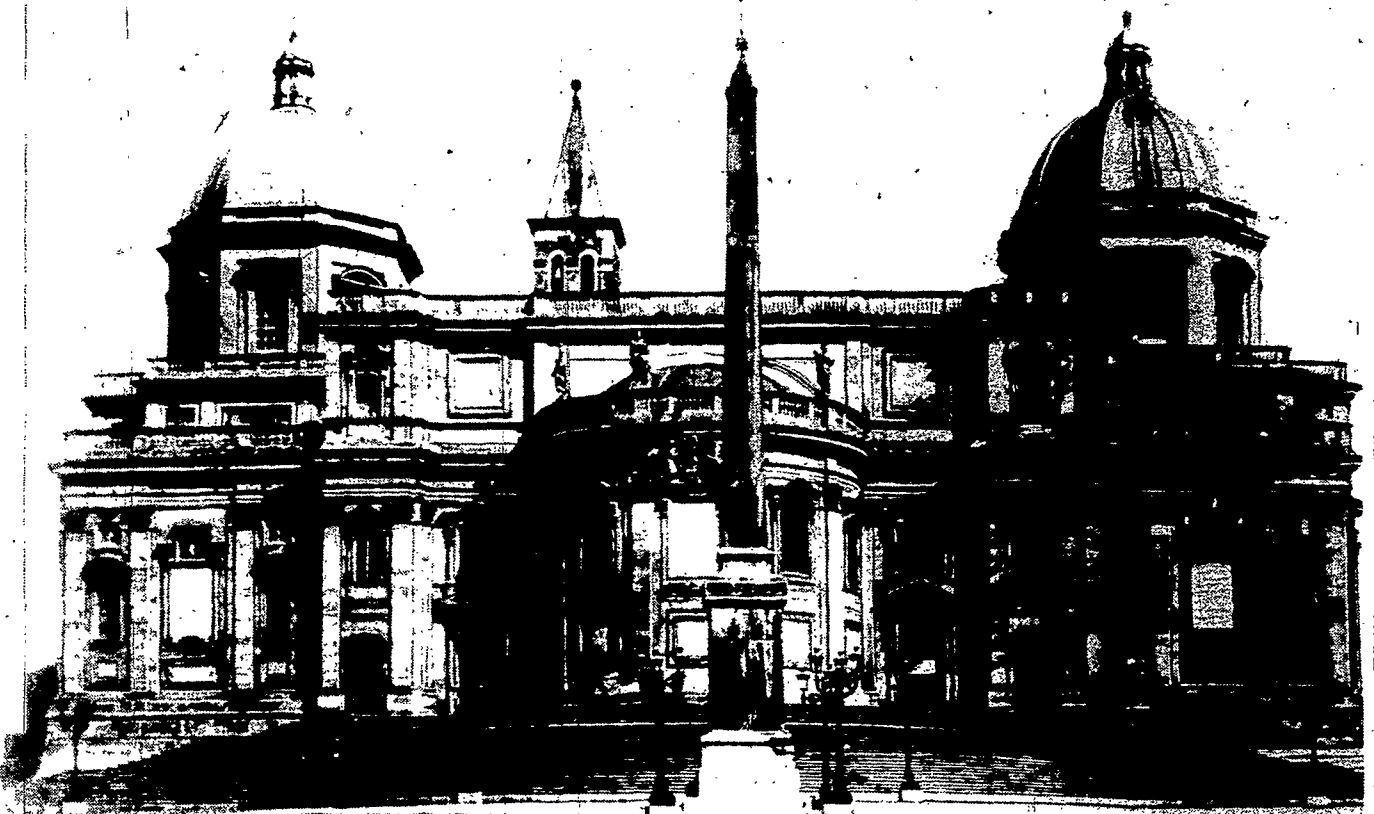
He called her so in a solemn way and began to call her by that name, with this title, but above all to invoke her, to take part as Mother in the life of the Church: this Church (St. Mary Major), which during the Council, became more deeply aware of her own nature and her own mission. To lay an even greater emphasis on this expression, Paul VI, together with the Council Fathers, came here, to St. Mary Major's Basilica, where Mary has been surrounded with special veneration and love for so many centuries, under the title of "Salus Populi Romani."

Following in the footsteps of this great predecessor, who was a real father to me, I, too, come here.

All my predecessors in St. Peter's Chair invite me here: the Servant of God, Pius XII; the Servant of God, Pius IX; all the generations of Romans, all the generations of Christians and the whole People of God. They seem to say, "Go! Honor the great mystery, hidden from eternity in God himself. Go, and bear witness to Christ our Savior, son of Mary! Go and announce this particular moment, the turning point in history of man's salvation."

This decisive point in the history of salvation is precisely the Immaculate Conception. God in his eternal love has chosen man from eternity: He has chosen him in his Son. God has chosen man, in order that he may reach the fullness of good by means of participation in his own life, divine Life, by means of grace. He has chosen him from eternity, and irreversibly. Neither original sin, nor the whole history of personal faults and social sins have been able to dissuade the eternal Father from this plan of love of his. They have not been able to cancel the choice of us in the eternal Son, the Word consubstantial with the Father.

Since this choice was to take form in the Incarnation, and since the Son of God was to become a man for our salvation, for this very reason the eternal Father chose for him, among men, his Mother. Each of us becomes man because he is conceived and born from his mother's womb. The eternal Father chose the same way for the humanity of his eternal Son. He



The Basilica of St. Mary Major, scene of the pontiff's Dec. 8 address.

chose his Mother from the people to whom he had entrusted his mysteries and promises in a special way for centuries. He chose her from the race of David and at the same time from the whole of mankind. He chose her of royal descent, but at the same time among poor people.

He chose her from the beginning, from the very first moment of conception, making her worthy of the divine motherhood to which she would be called at the appointed time. Her made her the first heir to the holiness of her own Son. The first among those redeemed by his blood, which he had received from her, humanly speaking. He made her spotless at the very moment of conception.

Today the whole Church contemplates the mystery of the Immaculate Conception and rejoices in it.

The Roman Church exults in this mystery and I, as the new Bishop of this church take part in this joy for the first time. For this reason I longed so much to come here, to this temple, where Mary has been venerated for centuries as "Salus Populi Romani." Do not this title, this invocation, tell us that salvation (salus) has become in a peculiar way the heritage of the Roman People (Romani Populi)? Is not this the salvation that Christ brought to us and that Christ continually brings to us, he alone? And is not his Mother, who precisely as his Mother was redeemed by him, her Son, in an exceptional, "more eminent" way, is not she, too, called by him, her Son, in a way that is more explicit, simple and powerful at the same time, to take part in the salvation of men, of the Roman people, of the whole of mankind? To lead everyone to the Redeemer. To bear witness to him, even without

words, only with love, in which "the genius of the mother" is expressed. To approach even those who put up most resistance, for whom it is most difficult to believe in love; who consider the world a great polygon "in which everyone struggles against everyone." To bring all — that is, each one — closer to her Son. To reveal the primacy of love in man's history. To announce the final victory of love. Is the Church thinking of this victory when she reminds us today of the words of the book of Genesis: "He (the woman's seed) shall bruise the serpent's head?"

The pope, at the beginning of his episcopal service in St. Peter's Chair in Rome, wishes to entrust the Church particularly to her in whom there was accomplished the stupendous and complete victory of good over evil, of love over hatred, of grace over sin; to her of whom Paul VI said that she is "the beginning of a better world," to the Blessed Virgin. He entrusts to her himself, as the servant of servants, and all those whom he serves, and all those who serve with him. He entrusts to her the Roman Church, as token and principle of all the churches in the world, in their universal unity. He entrusts it to her and offers it to her as her property!

"Totus Tuus ego sum et omnia mea Tua sunt. Accipio Te in mea omnia!" (I am all yours, and all that I have is yours. May you be my guide in everything.)

With this simple and at the same time solemn act of offering, the Bishop of Rome, John Paul II, wishes once more to reaffirm his own service to the People of God, which cannot but be the humble imitation of Christ and of her who said of herself: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord."

## Word for Sunday

By Father Albert Shamon

### Life Begins With A Call

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Jn. 1:35-42. (R1) 1 Sm. 3:3-10, 19. (R2) 1 Cor. 6:13-15, 17-20.

God is always trying to get in touch with us. Graciously, he uses signs and symbols we can understand. Last Sunday, God the Father used a mute star to summon pagan astrologers to His



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newborn Son. This Sunday shows God attempting to get in touch with His own people by using the spoken word, for they had the light of faith.

God called the young Samuel directly. He called him by name. Samuel was sleeping near the ark. It is important to put ourselves near the things of God. Three times God called Samuel. But three times the young, inexperienced Samuel misunderstood the call, thinking it was Eli. How often God speaks to us in Scripture and sacrament, and we too don't understand. We

expect the extraordinary, when all the while His call is so ordinary that it can be mistaken for a human call.

How patient, too, was Samuel! He didn't turn over and go to sleep after the third call. Nor did he grumble, "What's wrong with the old man; why does he call me and then deny it?" No, Samuel was patient and respectful. At the first call, he "ran;" at the second, he "rose and went;" at the third, "getting up and going to Eli." He made no rash judgment, so easy for the young to make regarding their elders. And well for him. Wise old Eli, though he didn't hear the call, knew what advice to give. "Speak, Lord," he told Samuel to say, "for your

servant is listening." So well did Samuel listen that Scripture tells us that no word of the Lord was without effect on him.

In the gospel, God again sends forth a call. Again the call comes to those lingering around persons close to God. John, the son of Zebedee, and Andrew were with John the Baptizer. Jesus walked by. Jesus had been baptized by John. Was He thinking of following John? Of course not, else He would not have walked by. Perhaps this gave John the insight he needed into Jesus. Men of deep spiritual caliber, like Jesus, followed John after baptism. When Jesus did not, but merely walked by, everything became clear to John. "Look!" he

pointed out, "There is the Lamb of God!" The two disciples heard what he said and followed Jesus.

When someone is following you, you somehow sense it, don't you? Jesus felt He was being followed. So He turned around and saw the two following Him. He asked them, "What are you looking for?" Not "what do you want?" But "what are you looking for?" The first attitude of discipleship is to seek. Only those who seek the Lord will find Him. They answered, "Rabbi, where do you stay?" They wanted to have a long talk with Him, so they wanted to go home with Him. Besides, they wanted to see how He lived! Always courteous, Jesus answered,

"Come and see." They went, they saw, and they found the Messiah! (Or He found them, for He was looking for them when He walked by and called.)

All life with God begins with a call. Samuel became a prophet because called by God. The followers of Jesus became apostles, when called by Him. And we become Christians when called by God at baptism. Only gradually do those called by God learn what following His call demands. St. Paul lists one demand: chastity — "shun lewd conduct." Discipleship is not easy; therefore the Church teaches us to pray, "Give us strength to follow Your call."