

**Opening Mass for the Monastic Formation Course
Rome - General House OCist - 22 August 2012
Memory of the Queenship of Mary.**

Readings: Isaiah 9, 1-3.5-6; Luke 1, 39-47

The readings for this memory of the Queenship of Mary speak more about joy than power. "You have made their gladness greater, you have made their joy increase" says the prophet Isaiah (Is 9,2). "From the moment your greeting reached my ears, the child in my womb leapt for joy" exclaims Elizabeth when she greets Mary (Luke 1,44).

Why so much joy? Because a child is to be born, because a child is going to be born into the world who will answer all its expectations. "For there is a child born for us, a son given to us" explains Isaiah (Is 9,5). "Why should I be honoured by a visit from the mother of my Lord!" (Luke 1,43). Elizabeth alerted by the Holy Spirit and by the sudden movement of John Baptist in her womb, recognises that Mary, who has come to see her, is the Mother who has conceived the Lord, the Mother of God.

Everyone was waiting for this Child: the people that walked in the darkness and slavery, who wait for "a peace that has no end" (Is 9,6) ; Elizabeth in her old age and John in his mother's womb. Everyone was waiting for this child. Everyone has in their hearts a need for light, for freedom, for peace, for a sense to life in the beginning as at the end, a need that only He can satisfy, He who alone is God and comes to mankind to live amongst him. All the desires of the human heart are tensed towards an answer truly accomplished, truly exhaustive: God, made man so as to love us with his whole being and fill our life with his friendship.

From the beginning of his earthly existence in Mary's womb, Jesus is already the answer to all our expectations and thus the supreme joy of our life, the joy of all.

Faced by these examples of joy in Christ, joy for Christ, we must examine and ask ourselves: Is Jesus for me, really the supreme joy? Is he really the joy of my life? Do I rejoice in his presence "as men rejoice at harvest time, as men are happy when they are dividing the spoils" (Is 9,2)? That is to say: is the joy for Jesus really a joy that finds its accomplishment in our daily work and the battle for life, in the same way that the harvest is the accomplishment of a farmer's work and the sharing of the spoils the accomplishment of the hunter or, after the battle, for the warrior? Is Christ truly the dearest thing in our life, as St Benedict asks? (cf RB 5,2)

The question of knowing whether Jesus Christ is the joy of our hearts is the question in the light of which we must constantly examine the path of our vocation. And that, even when we are not happy, when we are sad. Are we sad for Christ or for other reasons? Are we sad because we miss Jesus, because we do not love him sufficiently, or because we miss something else?

We know however that our heart is not simple, that our joy or our sadness are not always nor fully for the Lord. Often the reason of our joy or our sorrow is solely our own interest, our pride, our ambition. That is why we always need to have someone to govern our heart, someone who educates it to the truth of its desire, who educates it to prefer Christ to absolutely all else. We need a Queen who is the Mother and Mistress of our heart, a Queen who educates us to the preference of Christ.

Mary is that Mother and Mistress, that Queen. She educates us by having been the first to welcome Jesus, and by giving him to us, by carrying him into our house and our life, just as she did when she visited Elizabeth. She carries Him so closely to us that, interiorly, we are able to feel Him as did John Baptist.

In particular, Mary brings us Jesus because she teaches us to welcome Him. Elizabeth understood very well: "Yes blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled" (Luke 1,45) Mary brings Jesus to us because she believes in the gift of his presence that the word of God announced to her by the angel Gabriel. It is Mary's faith that welcomes Christ and gives Him to us, and it is in the same faith that we can welcome Christ in joyfulness of heart and then in turn, give Him to others, carrying Him in within us so as to offer Him to everyone as the fullness of the joy of life, as John Baptist would do.

At the end of this mass, we will go to the cloister to bless the new statue of the Virgin of the Fountain. It is a marble copy of the cement one that was badly damaged. It was carved in Viet Nam and arrived in the port of Genoa exactly on the day of the Visitation. It is significant that we should bless it today, at the beginning of the Monastic Formation Course, in your presence, you who represent the Cistercian and Benedictine Family in the whole world.

This Virgin has the particularity of carrying the Child Jesus on her shoulder, almost like a Saint Christopher who wants to save Jesus from the water. In this gesture, I think that we should see above all that fact, that for Mary, Jesus is above everything else, that Jesus is the most important thing that Mary wants to carry, to show and to give. We could call this statue "Our Lady of the preference for Christ", the same preference that saint Benedict asks of us in the Rule (cf RB 4,21; 5,2; 72,11).

The child lifted up in this way has his hands free to open them in a gesture of blessing and welcome, as if he wished to embrace each one of us, or rather as if he wished to be carried by each one of us, so that we should also become porters of Christ, people who have nothing dearer than Christ, and that we should transmit this preference to others as the greatest joy of life.

At Mary's feet there is a dove. Strange that the Holy Spirit should be placed so low! Usually he is figured in the heights, with his wings outstretched. But we can understand this particularity in the sense that when we place Jesus above everything else, above ourselves, the Holy Spirit can rest on the earth, near the living waters of baptismal grace. When we prefer Christ, the Spirit can rest, he has accomplished his mission and stays close to us to show us the way of saintliness, of the fullness of life in Christ.

This is what we ask, through the intercession of Mary, at the beginning and as the aim of this Monastic Formation Course. If we allow the Holy Spirit to form us as he formed Mary to the preference of Christ, the formation that we will receive will be fruitful in wisdom, joy and charity.

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