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"Touched by Mary's Gaze"

A selection of passages from Pope Benedict XVI's homilies and addresses during his recent visit to Paris and Lourdes, with links to the full texts.

09/17/2008

Homily at Mass Marking the 150th Anniversary of the Lourdes Apparitions

September 14, 2008

It is significant that during the first apparition to Bernadette, Mary begins with the sign of the Cross. More than a simple sign, it is an initiation into the mysteries of the faith that Bernadette receives from Mary. The sign of the Cross is a kind of synthesis of our faith, for it says how much God loves us; it tells us that there is a love in this world that is stronger than death, stronger than our weaknesses and sins. The power of love is stronger than the evil that threatens us. It is this mystery of the universality of God's love for men that Mary came to reveal here in Lourdes. She invites everyone of good will, all who suffer in heart or body, to raise their eyes to the Cross of Jesus so as to discover there the source of life, the source of salvation....

Mary comes to us as a mother always open to the needs of her children. Through the light streaming from

her face God's mercy is made manifest. We must allow ourselves to be touched by her gaze, for it lets us know that we are all loved by God, that he will never abandon us! Mary comes to remind us that humble and intense, trusting and persevering prayer must have a central place in our Christian lives. Prayer is indispensable if we are to receive Christ's power. 'People who pray are not wasting their time, even though the situation appears desperate and seems to call for action alone' (*Deus Caritas Est*, 36). Letting oneself become absorbed by activity risks depriving prayer of its specifically Christian character and its true efficacy. The prayer of the Rosary, so dear to Bernadette and to Lourdes pilgrims, concentrates within itself the depths of the Gospel message. It introduces us to contemplation of the face of Christ. From this prayer of the humble we can draw an abundance of graces.

For entire homily, click [here](#).

Homily at Mass with the Sick in Lourdes

September 15, 2008

Today Mary dwells in the joy and the glory of the Resurrection. The tears shed at the foot of the Cross have been transformed into a smile that nothing can erase, even as her maternal compassion toward us remains unchanged. The intervention of the Virgin Mary in offering succor throughout history testifies to this, and does not cease to call forth in the people of God an unshakable confidence in her: The *Memorare* prayer expresses this sentiment very well. Mary loves each of her children, giving particular attention to those who, like her Son at the hour of his Passion, are suffering: She loves them quite simply because they are her

children, according to the will of Christ on the Cross....

Christians have always sought the smile of Our Lady.... This smile of Mary is for all, but it is directed quite particularly to those who suffer, so that they can find comfort and solace therein. To seek Mary's smile is not an act of devotional or outmoded sentimentality, but rather the proper expression of the living and profoundly human relationship that binds us to her as our Mother....

Here in Lourdes...Bernadette contemplated this smile of Mary in a most particular way. It was the first response that the Beautiful Lady gave to the young visionary who wanted to know who she was. Before introducing herself some days later as 'the Immaculate Conception,' Mary first taught Bernadette to know her smile, this being the most appropriate point of entry into the

revelation of her mystery. In the smile of the most eminent of all creatures as she looks down upon us is reflected our dignity as children of God, that dignity that never abandons the sick person. This smile, a true reflection of God's tenderness, is the source of an invincible hope.

For entire homily, click [here](#).

Address to the Bishops of France

September 14, 2008

There is certainly one problem that arises with particular urgency everywhere: the situation of the family. We know that marriage and the family are today experiencing real turbulence. The words of the Evangelist about the boat in the storm on the lake may be applied to the family: 'Waves beat into the boat so that it was already filling' (*Mk* 4:37).

The factors that brought about this crisis are well known, and there is no need to list them here. For several decades, laws in different countries have been relativizing the nature of the family as the primordial cell of society. Often they strive to serve the ways and demands of particular individuals or groups than to promote the common good of society. The stable union of a man and a woman ordered to building earthly happiness through the birth of children given by God is no longer, in the minds of certain people, the reference point for conjugal commitment.

Experience shows, however, that the family is the foundation on which the whole of society rests. Moreover, Christians know that the family is also the living cell of the Church. The more the family is steeped in the spirit and values of the Gospel, the more the Church herself will be

enriched by them and the better she will fulfill her vocation.

I recognize and encourage warmly the efforts you are making to support the various associations actively assisting families. You have reason to uphold firmly, even at the cost of opposing prevailing trends, the principles that constitute the strength and the greatness of the sacrament of Matrimony. The Church wishes to remain utterly faithful to the mandate entrusted to her by her Founder, her Master and Lord, Jesus Christ. She does not cease to repeat with him: 'What God has joined together, let no man put asunder!' (*Mt 19:6*). The Church did not give herself this mission; she received it.

To be sure, no one can deny that certain families experience trials, sometimes very painful ones. Families in difficulty must be

supported; they must be helped to understand the greatness of marriage and encouraged not to relativize God's will and the laws of life that he has given us.

A particularly painful situation concerns those who are divorced and remarried. Since the Church cannot oppose the will of Christ, she firmly maintains the principle of the indissolubility of marriage while surrounding with the greatest affection those men and women who, for a variety of reasons, fail to respect it. Hence initiatives aimed at blessing irregular unions cannot be admitted. The post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* leaves open the path to a conception [of matrimony] that is respectful of truth and of charity.

For entire address, click [here](#).

**Discourse at the Conclusion of a
Eucharistic Procession in Lourdes**

September 14, 2008

The sacred Host exposed before our eyes speaks of the infinite power of Love manifested on the glorious Cross. The sacred Host speaks to us of the incredible abasement of the One who made himself poor so as to make us rich in him, the One who accepted the loss of everything so as to win us for his Father. The sacred Host is the living, efficacious, and real sacrament of the eternal presence of the Savior of mankind in his Church.

My brothers and sisters, my friends, let us accept it; may you accept offering yourselves to him who has given us everything, who came not to judge the world but to save it (*Jn* 3:17); accept the recognition in our lives of the active presence of him who is present here, exposed before our eyes. Accept offering him your very lives!

The holy Virgin Mary, the Immaculate Conception accepted giving everything, offering her body so as to receive the Body of the Creator two thousand years ago.... Holy Virgin, help us contemplate, help us adore, help us to love, to grow in love for him who loved us so much, so as to live eternally with him.

For entire discourse, click [here](#).

Address at the Conclusion of the Torchlight Procession

September 13, 2008

In the course of the apparitions, it is notable that Bernadette prays the Rosary under the gaze of Mary, who joins her at the moment of the doxology [Glory be to the Father...]. This fact confirms the profoundly theocentric character of the Rosary. When we pray it, Mary offers us her heart and her gaze so as to

contemplate the life of her Son, Jesus Christ....

Mary teaches us to pray, to make of our prayer an act of love for God and an act of fraternal charity. By praying with Mary, our hearts welcome those who suffer. How can this fail to transform our lives? Why should our whole life and being not become places of hospitality for our neighbors?...

[The procession] summarizes our condition as Christians on a journey: We need light, and at the same time we are called to be light. Sin makes us blind; it prevents us from making ourselves available to guide our brothers and sisters, and it makes us unwilling to trust them to guide us. We need to be enlightened, and we repeat the prayer of blind Bartimaeus, 'Master, may I see!' (*Mk* 10:51). May I see the sin that holds

me back, but above all, Lord, may I see your glory!

For entire address, click [here](#).

Discourse to the world of culture in Paris

September 12, 2008

The novelty of Christian proclamation is that it can now say to everyone: God has revealed himself. He personally. Now the way to him is open. The novelty of Christian proclamation consists in this one fact: He has revealed himself.... But just as in the past, when behind the many images of God the question concerning the unknown God was both hidden and present, so too the present absence of God is silently besieged by the question concerning him: *Quaerere Deum*—to seek God, and to let oneself be found by him; that is no less necessary today than it was in former times.

A purely positivistic culture that tried to drive the question concerning God into the subjective realm as being unscientific would be the capitulation of reason, the renunciation of its highest possibilities, and hence a disaster for humanity, with very grave consequences. What gave Europe's culture its foundation—the search for God and the readiness to listen to him—remains today the basis of any genuine culture.

For entire discourse, click [here](#).

Vespers Address at Notre Dame in Paris

September 12, 2008

What marvels surround our work in the service of God's word! We are instruments of the Holy Spirit; God is so humble that he uses us to spread his word. We become his voice once we have listened carefully to the

word coming from his mouth. We place his word on our lips in order to bring it to the world. He accepts the offering of our prayer and through it he communicates himself to everyone we meet.... He has chosen us to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth; he made us his elect, even before we came into existence by a mysterious gift of his grace....

I implore the Lord to increase within us the sense of this unity of the word of God, which is the sign, the pledge, and the guarantee of the unity of the Church: There is no love in the Church without love for the word; there is no Church without unity around Christ the Redeemer, no fruits of redemption without love of God and neighbor, according to the two commandments that sum up all of Sacred Scripture!

For entire address, click [here](#).

Homily at Mass on the Esplanade des Invalides in Paris

September 13, 2008

In this Pauline Year we discover in the First Epistle to the Corinthians how much the counsels of the Apostle remain important today: 'Shun the worship of idols,' he writes (*1 Cor* 10:14).... This appeal to shun idols, dear brothers and sisters, is also pertinent today. Has not our modern world created its own idols? Has it not imitated, perhaps inadvertently, the pagans of antiquity by diverting man from his true end, from the joy of living eternally with God? This is a question we cannot help asking, if we are honest with ourselves: What is important in my life? What is my first priority?

The word 'idol' comes from the Greek for 'image,' 'figure,' 'representation,' and also 'ghost,' 'phantom,' 'vain appearance.' An idol

is a delusion, for it turns its worshipper away from reality and places him in the kingdom of mere appearances. Now, is this not a temptation in our day—the only day we can act upon effectively? It is tempting to idolize a past that no longer exists, forgetting its shortcomings; it is tempting to idolize a future that does not yet exist, in the belief that human beings by their own efforts alone can bring about the kingdom of eternal joy on earth!...

How do we reach God? How do we manage to discover or rediscover him whom we seek at the deepest core of our being, even though we so often forget him? St. Paul asks us to make use not only of our reason, but above all of our faith, in order to discover God. Now, what does faith say to us? The bread we break is a communion with the Body of Christ. The cup we bless is a communion

with the Blood of Christ. This extraordinary revelation comes from Christ and has been transmitted to us by the Apostles and by the whole Church for almost two thousand years: Christ instituted the sacrament of the Eucharist on the evening of Holy Thursday. He wanted his sacrifice to be presented anew in an unbloody manner every time a priest repeats the words of consecration over the bread and wine.

Millions of times over the past twenty centuries—in the humblest chapels and in the most magnificent basilicas and cathedrals—the risen Lord has given himself to his people, thus becoming, in the famous expression of St. Augustine, ‘more intimate to us than we are to ourselves’ (*Confessions*, III, 6, 11).

Brothers and sisters, let us give the greatest veneration to the sacrament of the Body and Blood of the Lord,

the Blessed Sacrament of the real presence of the Lord to his Church and to all humanity. Let us take every opportunity to show him respect and love! Let us give him the greatest marks of honor! Through our words, our silence, our gestures, let us never allow our faith in the risen Christ, present in the Eucharist, to lose its savor in us or around us!...

Allow me to issue an appeal, confident in the faith and generosity of the young people who are considering a religious or priestly vocation: Do not be afraid! Do not be afraid to give your life to Christ! Nothing will ever replace the ministry of priests at the heart of the Church! Nothing will ever replace a Mass for the salvation of the world! Dear young (and not so young) people who are listening to me, do not let Christ's call go unanswered....

He himself taught us to shun idolatry by inviting us to build our house 'on rock' (Lk 6:48). Who is this rock if not himself? Our thoughts, words, and actions acquire their true dimension only if we refer them to the Gospel message: 'Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks' (Lk 6:45). When we speak, do we seek the good of our interlocutor? When we think, do we seek to harmonize our thinking with God's thinking? When we act, do we seek to spread the Love that gives us life?"

For entire homily, click [here](#).

Address to Young People in Paris

September 13, 2008

All of you desire to love and be loved! It is to God that you must turn if you want to learn how to love and to find the strength to love. The Holy Spirit, who is Love, can open your hearts to accept the gift of genuine

love. All of you are seeking the truth; all of you want to live in truth, to live truly in it! This truth is Christ....

By revealing to us the crucified and risen Lord, the Holy Spirit impels us to bear witness to Christ. You are at an age marked by great generosity. You need to speak about Christ to everyone around you, to your families and friends, wherever you study, work, and relax. Do not be afraid! Have 'the courage to live the Gospel and the boldness to proclaim it.' (*Message to the Young People of the World*, July 20, 2007). Just so, I encourage you to find ways to proclaim God all around you, basing your testimony on the power of the Spirit that we ask for in prayer.

Bring the Good News to people your age and to others as well. They know what it means to experience difficulty in relationships, worry and uncertainty in the face of work and

study. They have experienced suffering, but they have also known unique moments of joy. Be witnesses of God, for as young people, you are fully a part of the Catholic community through Baptism and our common profession of faith (Eph 4:5). The Church has confidence in you, and I want to tell you that!...

Many of you wear a cross on a chain around your neck. I wear one, too, as every bishop does. It is not a mere decoration or piece of jewelry. It is the precious symbol of our faith, the visible and material sign that we belong to Christ....

Dear young people, I know that venerating the Cross can sometimes bring mockery and even persecution. The Cross in some way seems to threaten our human security, yet above all else, it proclaims God's grace and confirms our salvation.

This evening I entrust you with the Cross of Christ.

The Holy Spirit will enable you to understand its mystery of love. Then you will exclaim with St. Paul: 'May I never boast of anything but the Cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ; by it the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world' (*Gal* 6:14). Paul came to understand the seemingly paradoxical words of Jesus, who taught that it is only by giving ('losing') one's life that one finds it (*Mk* 8:35; *Jn* 12:24), and came to the conclusion that the Cross expresses the fundamental law of love, the perfect formula for real life. May a growing understanding of this mystery of the Cross lead you to discover the call to serve Christ without reserve....

*For entire address, click [**here**](#).*

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