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"Heaven has a heart"

A homily given by Benedict XVI on August 15, 2005, on the role our Lady should have in each Christian's life.

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The Feast of the Assumption is a day of joy. God has won. Love has won. It has won life. Love has shown that it is stronger than death, that God possesses the true strength and that his strength is goodness and love.

Mary was taken up body and soul into Heaven: there is even room in God for the body. Heaven is no longer a very remote sphere unknown to us.

We have a mother in Heaven. And the Mother of God, the Mother of the Son of God, is our Mother. He himself has said so. He made her our Mother when he said to the disciple and to all of us: "Behold, your Mother!" We have a Mother in Heaven. Heaven is open, Heaven has a heart.

In the Gospel we heard the *Magnificat*, that great poem inspired by the Holy Spirit that came from Mary's lips, indeed, from Mary's heart. This marvellous canticle mirrors the entire soul, the entire personality of Mary. We can say that this hymn of hers is a portrait of Mary, a true icon in which we can see her exactly as she is. I would like to

highlight only two points in this great canticle.

It begins with the word "*Magnificat*": my soul "magnifies" the Lord, that is, "proclaims the greatness" of the Lord. Mary wanted God to be great in the world, great in her life and present among us all. She was not afraid that God might be a "rival" in our life, that with his greatness he might encroach on our freedom, our vital space. She knew that if God is great, we too are great. Our life is not oppressed but raised and expanded: it is precisely then that it becomes great in the splendour of God.

The fact that our first parents thought the contrary was the core of original sin. They feared that if God were too great, he would take something away from their life. They thought that they could set God aside to make room for themselves.

This was also the great temptation of the modern age, of the past three or four centuries. More and more people have thought and said: "But this God does not give us our freedom; with all his commandments, he restricts the space in our lives. So God has to disappear; we want to be autonomous and independent. Without this God we ourselves would be gods and do as we pleased."

This was also the view of the Prodigal Son, who did not realize that he was "free" precisely because he was in his father's house. He left for distant lands and squandered his estate. In the end, he realized that precisely because he had gone so far away from his father, instead of being free he had become a slave; he understood that only by returning home to his father's house would he be truly free, in the full beauty of life.

This is how it is in our modern epoch. Previously, it was thought and believed that by setting God aside and being autonomous, following only our own ideas and inclinations, we would truly be free to do whatever we liked without anyone being able to give us orders. But when God disappears, men and women do not become greater; indeed, they lose the divine dignity, their faces lose God's splendour. In the end, they turn out to be merely products of a blind evolution and, as such, can be used and abused. This is precisely what the experience of our epoch has confirmed for us.

Only if God is great is humankind also great. With Mary, we must begin to understand that this is so. We must not drift away from God but make God present; we must ensure that he is great in our lives. Thus, we too will become divine; all the splendour of the divine dignity will

then be ours. Let us apply this to our own lives.

It is important that God be great among us, in public and in private life.

In public life, it is important that God be present, for example, through the cross on public buildings, and that he be present in our community life, for only if God is present do we have an orientation, a common direction; otherwise, disputes become impossible to settle, for our common dignity is no longer recognized.

Let us make God great in public and in private life. This means making room for God in our lives every day, starting in the morning with prayers, and then dedicating time to God, giving Sundays to God. We do not waste our free time if we offer it to God. If God enters into our time, all time becomes greater, roomier, richer.

A second observation: Mary's poem, the *Magnificat*, is quite original; yet at the same time, it is a "fabric" woven throughout of "threads" from the Old Testament, of words of God.

Thus, we see that Mary was, so to speak, "at home" with God's word, she lived on God's word, she was penetrated by God's word. To the extent that she spoke with God's words, she thought with God's words, her thoughts were God's thoughts, her words, God's words. She was penetrated by divine light and this is why she was so resplendent, so good, so radiant with love and goodness.

Mary lived on the Word of God, she was imbued with the Word of God. And the fact that she was immersed in the Word of God and was totally familiar with the Word also endowed her later with the inner enlightenment of wisdom.

Whoever thinks with God thinks well, and whoever speaks to God speaks well. They have valid criteria to judge all the things of the world. They become prudent, wise, and at the same time good; they also become strong and courageous with the strength of God, who resists evil and fosters good in the world.

Thus, Mary speaks with us, speaks to us, invites us to know the Word of God, to love the Word of God, to live with the Word of God, to think with the Word of God. And we can do so in many different ways: by reading Sacred Scripture, by participating especially in the Liturgy, in which Holy Church throughout the year opens the entire book of Sacred Scripture to us. She opens it to our lives and makes it present in our lives.

But I am also thinking of the *Compendium of the Catechism of the*

Catholic Church that we recently published, in which the Word of God is applied to our lives and the reality of our lives interpreted; it helps us enter into the great "temple" of God's Word, to learn to love it and, like Mary, to be penetrated by this Word.

Thus, life becomes luminous and we have the basic criterion with which to judge; at the same time, we receive goodness and strength.

Mary is taken up body and soul into the glory of Heaven, and with God and in God she is Queen of Heaven and earth. And is she really so remote from us?

The contrary is true. Precisely because she is with God and in God, she is very close to each one of us.

While she lived on this earth she could only be close to a few people. Being in God, who is close to us, actually, "within" all of us, Mary

shares in this closeness of God. Being in God and with God, she is close to each one of us, knows our hearts, can hear our prayers, can help us with her motherly kindness and has been given to us, as the Lord said, precisely as a "mother" to whom we can turn at every moment.

She always listens to us, she is always close to us, and being Mother of the Son, participates in the power of the Son and in his goodness. We can always entrust the whole of our lives to this Mother, who is not far from any one of us.

On this feast day, let us thank the Lord for the gift of the Mother, and let us pray to Mary to help us find the right path every day. Amen.

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