



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO AUSTRIA
ON THE OCCASION OF THE 850th ANNIVERSARY
OF THE FOUNDATION OF THE SHRINE OF MARIAZELL

PRAYER MEETING AT THE "MARIENSÄULE"

GREETING OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Am Hof, Vienna
Friday, 7 September 2007

Your Eminence,
Your Honour,
Dear Brothers and Sisters!

As the first stop of my pilgrimage to Mariazell I have chosen the *Mariensäule*, to reflect briefly with all of you on the significance of the Mother of God for Austria past and present, and her significance for each one of us. I offer a cordial greeting to all those gathered here to pray beneath the *Mariensäule*. I thank you, dear Eminence, for the warm words of welcome at the beginning of our celebration. I greet the Mayor of the capital and the other Authorities present. I particularly greet the young people and the representatives of the foreign-language Catholic communities in the Archdiocese of Vienna, who will gather after this Liturgy of the Word in the church and will remain until tomorrow in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament. I have heard that you have been here for three hours already. I can only express my admiration and say *Vergelt's Gott!* With this adoration you will very concretely accomplish what all of us wish to do in these days: with Mary, to look to Christ.

From earliest times, faith in Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, has been linked to a particular

veneration for his Mother, for the Woman in whose womb he took on our human nature, sharing even in the beating of her heart. Mary is the Woman who accompanied Jesus with sensitivity and deference throughout his life, even to his death on the Cross. At the end, he commended to her maternal love the beloved disciple and, with him, all humanity. In her maternal love, Mary continues to take under her protection people of all languages and cultures, and to lead them together, within a multiform unity, to Christ. In our problems and needs we can turn to Mary. Yet we must also learn from her to accept one another lovingly in the same way that she has accepted all of us: each as an individual, willed as such and loved by God. In God's universal family, in which there is a place for everyone, each person must develop his gifts for the good of all.

The *Mariensäule*, built by the Emperor Ferdinand III in thanksgiving for the liberation of Vienna from great danger and inaugurated by him exactly 360 years ago, must also be a sign of hope for us today. How many persons, over the years, have stood before this column and lifted their gaze to Mary in prayer! How many have experienced in times of trouble the power of her intercession! Our Christian hope includes much more than the mere fulfilment of our wishes and desires, great or small. We turn our gaze to Mary, because she points out to us the great hope to which we have been called (cf. *Eph* 1:18), because she personifies our true humanity!

This is what we have just heard in the biblical reading: even before the creation of the world, God chose us in Christ. From eternity he has known and loved each one of us! And why did he choose us? To be holy and immaculate before him in love! This is no impossible task: in Christ he has already brought it to fulfilment. We have been redeemed! By virtue of our communion with the Risen Christ, God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing. Let us open our hearts; let us accept this precious legacy! Then we will be able to sing, together with Mary, the praises of his glorious grace. And if we continue to bring our everyday concerns to the immaculate Mother of Christ, she will help us to open our little hopes ever more fully towards that great and true hope which gives meaning to our lives and is able to fill us with a deep and imperishable joy.

With these sentiments I would now like to join you in looking to Mary Immaculate, entrusting to her intercession the prayers which you have just now presented, and imploring her maternal protection upon this country and its people:

Holy Mary, Immaculate Mother of our Lord Jesus Christ, in you God has given us the model of the Church and of genuine humanity.

To you I entrust the country of Austria and its people. Help all of us to follow your example and to direct our lives completely to God!

Grant that, by looking to Christ, we may become ever more like him: true children of God! Then we too, filled with every spiritual blessing, will be able to conform ourselves more fully to his will and to become instruments of his peace for Austria, Europe and the world.

Amen.

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