



The Holy See

HOLY MASS ON THE FEAST OF THE TRANSLATION
OF THE MIRACULOUS IMAGE OF OUR LADY SALUS POPULI ROMANI

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

*Basilica of Saint Mary Major
Sunday, 28 January 2018*

[Multimedia]

As the journeying People of God, we are here to pause at our Mother's temple. The presence of the Mother makes this temple a family home for us sons and daughters. Together with generations and generations of Romans, we recognize in this house of our mother our own home, the home where we can find refreshment, consolation, protection, shelter. The Christian people have understood, from the very beginning, that in difficulties and trials we need to turn to our Mother, as the most ancient Marian hymn has it: *Beneath your protection, we seek refuge, O Holy Mother of God; do not despise our petitions in our necessities, but deliver us always from all dangers, O Glorious and Blessed Virgin. Amen.*

We seek refuge. Our fathers in faith taught that in turbulent moments we should gather under the mantle of the Holy Mother of God. At one time those who were persecuted and in need sought refuge with high-ranking noble women: when their cloak, regarded as inviolable, was held out as a sign of welcoming, protection had been granted. So it is for us with regard to Our Lady, the highest woman of the human race. Her mantle is always open to receive us and gather us. The Christian East reminds us of this, where many celebrate the Protection of the Mother of God, who in a beautiful icon is depicted with her mantle sheltering her sons and daughters and covering the whole world. Monks of old recommended, in times of trial, that we take refuge beneath the mantle of the Holy Mother of God: calling upon her as "Holy Mother of God" was already a guarantee of protection and help, this prayer over and again: "Holy Mother of God", "Holy Mother of God"... Just like this.

This wisdom, that comes to us from far off, helps us: the Mother protects the faith, safeguards relationships, saves those in storms and preserves them from evil. Where our Mother is at home, the devil does not enter in. Where our Mother is at home, the devil does not enter in. Where our Mother is present, turmoil does not prevail, fear does not conquer. Which of us does not need this, which of us is not sometimes distressed or anxious? How often our heart is a stormy sea, where the waves of our problems pile up and the winds of our troubles do not stop blowing! Mary is our secure ark in the midst of the flood. It will not be ideas or technology that will give us comfort or hope, but our Mother's face, her hands that caress our life, her mantle that gives us shelter. Let us learn how to find refuge, going each day to our Mother.

Do not despise our petitions, the hymn continues. When we petition her, Mary implores on our behalf. There is a beautiful title in Greek that says this: *Grigorousa*, that is, "she who intercedes swiftly". And it is this *swiftly* that Luke uses in the Gospel to indicate how Mary went to Elizabeth: quickly, immediately! She intercedes at once, she does not delay, we heard in the Gospel, when she brings the people's concrete need to Jesus at once: "They have no wine" (*Jn 2:3*), they have no more! This is what she does each time, if we call on her: when there is no hope, when joy is scarce, when our strength is all used up, when life's star grows dark, our Mother intervenes. And if we call on her, she intervenes even more. She is attentive to our weariness, sensitive to storms – the storms of life, she is close to our hearts. And she never, never despises our prayers; she does not let even one of them fall to the ground. She is our Mother, she is never ashamed of us; on the contrary, she waits for the chance to help her children.

One event can help us understand this. Next to a hospital bed, a mother was keeping watch over her son, who was in pain after an accident. The mother complained to the priest, saying: "There is one thing that the Lord did not grant us mothers". "What is that?" asked the priest. "To take away the pain of our children", answered the woman. Here we see a mother's heart: she is not embarrassed by injuries, by her children's vulnerability, but wants to take these injuries upon herself. And God's Mother – and our Mother – can take things upon herself, can console, keep watch and cure.

The hymn continues: *deliver us from all dangers*. The Lord himself knows that we need refuge and shelter in the midst of so many dangers. This is why at the most critical moment on the cross, he said to his beloved disciple, to every disciple: "Behold, your Mother!" (*Jn 19:27*). The Mother is not an "extra", something optional; she is Christ's witness. And we need her as a traveller needs refreshment, as a small child needs to be carried in one's arms. There is great danger for the faith if we live without our Mother, without her protection, allowing ourselves to be carried along by life like leaves by the wind. The Lord knows this, and recommends that we welcome his Mother. This is not a question of spiritual etiquette, but is needed for us to live. Loving her is not a poem; it is a question of being alive. For without a Mother we cannot be sons and daughters. And before all else, we are sons and daughters, beloved sons and daughters, who have God as Father and Our Lady as Mother.

The Second Vatican Council teaches that Mary is “a sign of sure hope and solace to the people of God during its sojourn on earth” (Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, VIII, V). It is a sign, the sign that God has placed for us. If we do not follow it, we will lose our way. For there are signposts in the spiritual life, that are to be adhered to. They show to us “who still journey on earth surrounded by dangers and difficulties” (*ibid.*, 62), the Mother who has already reached her destination. Who better than she can accompany us on the journey? What are we waiting for? Just as the disciple beneath the cross received the Mother, “took her to his own home”, says the Gospel (*Jn 19:27*), so we too, from this home of our Mother, invite Mary to our home, into our hearts, our lives. We cannot stand neutral or separated from our Mother; otherwise we will lose our identity as sons and daughters and our identity as a people, and we will live out a Christianity made up of ideas, of plans, without commitment, without tenderness, without a heart. But without a heart, there is no love and the faith runs the risk of becoming just a nice story from another age. Our Mother, on the other hand, safeguards and teaches her sons and daughters. She loves them and protects them, so they may love and protect the world. Let us invite our Mother into our daily lives, make her a constant presence in our homes, our certain refuge. May we give every day to her. May we invoke her in every storm. And let us not forget to turn to her to thank her.

Gazing at her now that she has just emerged from hospital, let us look upon her tenderly and let us greet her as the Christians in Ephesus greeted her. All of us together, three times: “Holy Mother of God”. All together: “Holy Mother of God, Holy Mother of God, Holy Mother of God”.