



# The Holy See

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POPE JOHN PAUL II

**GENERAL AUDIENCE**

*Wednesday, 5 March 1997*

## ***Mary is active in her Son's mission***

1. Describing Mary's presence in Jesus' public life, the Second Vatican Council recalls her involvement at Cana on the occasion of the first miracle: "At the marriage feast of Cana, moved with pity, she brought about by her intercession the beginning of miracles of Jesus the Messiah (cf. Jn 2:1-11)" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 58).

Following the Evangelist John, the Council points out the Mother's discreet and effective role, when by her words she persuades her Son to perform his "first sign". Although her influence is discreet and maternal, her presence proves decisive.

The Blessed Virgin's initiative is all the more surprising if one considers the inferior status of women in Jewish society. At Cana, in fact, Jesus does not only recognize the dignity and role of the feminine genius, but by welcoming his Mother's intervention, he gives her the opportunity to participate in his messianic work. The epithet "Woman", with which Jesus addresses Mary (cf. Jn 2:4), is not in contrast with his intention. Indeed it has no negative connotations, and Jesus will use it again when he addresses his Mother at the foot of the Cross (cf. Jn 19:26). According to some interpretations, this title "Woman" presents Mary as the New Eve, the mother in faith of all believers.

In the text cited, the Council uses the expression "moved with pity", letting it be understood that Mary was prompted by her merciful heart. Having sensed the eventual disappointment of the newly married couple and guests because of the lack of wine, the Blessed Virgin compassionately suggests to Jesus that he intervene with his messianic power.

To some, Mary's request may appear excessive, since it subordinates the beginning of the Messiah's miracles to an act of filial devotion. Jesus himself dealt with this difficulty when, by assenting to his mother's request, he shows the Lord's superabundance in responding to human expectations, manifesting also what a mother's love can do.

2. The expression "the beginning of his miracles", which the Council has taken from John's text, attracts our attention. The Greek term *arche*, translated as "beginning", is used by John in the Prologue of his Gospel: "In the *beginning* was the Word" (1:1). This significant coincidence suggests a parallel between the very origins of Christ's glory in eternity and the first manifestation of this same glory in his earthly mission.

By emphasizing Mary's initiative in the first miracle and then recalling her presence on Calvary at the foot of the Cross, the Evangelist helps us understand how Mary's co-operation is extended to the whole of Christ's work. The Blessed Virgin's request is placed within the divine plan of salvation.

In the first "sign" performed by Jesus, the Fathers of the Church glimpsed an important symbolic dimension, seeing the transformation of the water into wine as the announcement of the passage from the Old to the New Covenant. At Cana it is precisely the water in the jars, destined for the purification of the Jews and the fulfilment of the legal prescriptions (cf. Mk 7:1-15), which becomes the new wine of the wedding feast, a symbol of the definitive union between God and humanity.

3. The context of a wedding banquet, chosen by Jesus for his first miracle, refers to the marriage symbolism used frequently in the Old Testament to indicate the Covenant between God and his People (cf. Hos 2:21; Jer 2:1-8; Ps 44; etc.), and in the New Testament to signify Christ's union with the Church (cf. Jn 3:28-30; Eph 5:25-32; Rv 21:1-2, etc.).

Jesus' presence at Cana is also a sign of God's saving plan for marriage. In this perspective, the lack of wine can be interpreted as an allusion to the lack of love that unfortunately often threatens marital unions. Mary asks Jesus to intervene on behalf of all married couples, who can only be freed from the dangers of infidelity, misunderstanding and division by a love which is based on God. The grace of the sacrament offers the couple this superior strength of love, which can reinforce their commitment to fidelity even in difficult circumstances.

According to the interpretation of Christian authors, the miracle at Cana also has a deep Eucharistic meaning. Performing this miracle near the time of the Jewish feast Passover (cf. Jn 2:13), Jesus, as he did in multiplying the loaves (cf. Jn 6:4), shows his intention to prepare the true paschal banquet, the Eucharist. His desire at the wedding in Cana seems to be emphasized further by the presence of wine, which alludes to the blood of the New Covenant, and by the context of a banquet.

In this way, after being the reason for Jesus' presence at the celebration, Mary obtains the miracle of the new wine which prefigures the Eucharist, the supreme sign of the presence of her risen Son among the disciples.

4. At the end of the account of Jesus' first miracle, made possible by the firm faith of the Lord's Mother in her divine Son, the Evangelist John concludes: "and his disciples believed in him" (2:11). At Cana, Mary begins the Church's journey of faith, preceding the disciples and directing the servants' attention to Christ.

Her persevering intercession likewise encourages those who at times face the experience of "God's silence". They are asked to hope beyond all hope, always trusting in the Lord's goodness.

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*To the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors the Holy Father said:*

I am pleased to welcome the English-speaking visitors, especially the pilgrim groups from the United States of America. My special greeting goes to the students from the Bologna Center of Johns Hopkins University. I also thank the choirs for their praise of God in song. Upon all of you I cordially invoke the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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