



# The Holy See

---

POPE JOHN PAUL II

**GENERAL AUDIENCE**

*Wednesday, 6 August 1997*

1. The Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium* of the Second Vatican Council, after presenting Mary as "pre-eminent and as a wholly unique member of the Church", declares her to be the Church's "type and outstanding model in faith and charity" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 53).

The Council Fathers attribute to Mary the function of "type", that is, figure, "of the Church", borrowing the term from St Ambrose who expresses himself thus in his commentary on the Annunciation: "Yes, she [Mary] is betrothed, but she is a virgin because she is a type of the Church which is immaculate but a bride: a virgin, she conceived us by the Spirit; a virgin, she gave birth to us without pain" (*In Ev. sec. Luc.*, II, 7, *CCL*, 14, 33, 102-106). Thus Mary is a type of the Church because of her immaculate holiness, her virginity, her betrothal and her motherhood.

St Paul uses the word "type", to give tangible form to a spiritual reality. In fact, he sees in the crossing of the Red Sea by the People of Israel a "type" or image of Christian Baptism, and in the manna and in the water which gushed from the rock, a "type" or image of the Eucharistic food and drink (cf. 1 Cor 10:1-11).

By defining Mary as a type of the Church, the Council invites us to see in her the visible figure of the Church's spiritual reality, and in her spotless motherhood, the announcement of the Church's virginal motherhood.

2. It is necessary to explain that, unlike the Old Testament images or types, which are only prefigurations of future realities, in Mary the spiritual reality signified is already eminently present.

The Red Sea crossing described in the Book of Exodus is a saving event of liberation, but it was

certainly not a baptism capable of remitting sins and giving new life. Likewise, the manna, a precious gift from Yahweh to his people wandering in the desert, contained nothing of the future reality of the Eucharist, the Body of the Lord, nor did the water which gushed from the rock already contain Christ's Blood, shed for the multitude.

The Exodus is the great work accomplished by Yahweh for his people, but it does not constitute the definitive spiritual redemption which Christ would achieve in the paschal mystery.

Moreover, referring to Jewish practices, Paul recalls: "These are only a shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ" (Col 2:17). This is echoed in the Letter to the Hebrews which, systematically developing this interpretation, presents the worship of the Old Covenant as "a copy and shadow of the heavenly sanctuary" (Heb 8:5).

3. However, in affirming that Mary is a type of the Church, the Council does not intend to equate her with the figures or types of the Old Testament, but instead to affirm that in her the spiritual reality proclaimed and represented is completely fulfilled.

In fact, the Blessed Virgin is a type of the Church, not as an imperfect prefiguration, but as the spiritual fullness which will be found in various ways in the Church's life. The particular relationship that exists here between the image and the reality represented is based on the divine plan, which establishes a close bond between Mary and the Church. The plan of salvation which orders the prefigurations of the Old Testament to fulfilment in the New Covenant likewise determines that Mary would live in a perfect way what was later to be fulfilled in the Church.

The perfection God conferred upon Mary, therefore, acquires its most authentic meaning if it is interpreted as a prelude to divine life in the Church.

4. After saying that Mary is a "type of the Church", the Council adds that she is her "outstanding model", an example of perfection to be followed and imitated. Indeed, Mary is an "outstanding model" because her perfection surpasses that of all the other members of the Church.

Significantly, the Council adds that she carries out this role "in faith and in charity". Without forgetting that Christ is the first model, the Council suggests in this way that there are interior dispositions proper to the model realized in Mary, which help the Christian to establish an authentic relationship with Christ. In fact, by looking at Mary, the believer learns to live in deeper communion with Christ, to adhere to him with a living faith and to place his trust and his hope in him, loving him with his whole being.

The functions of "type and model of the Church" refer in particular to Mary's virginal motherhood and shed light on her particular place in the work of salvation. This basic structure of Mary's being is reflected in the motherhood and virginity of the Church.

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

I am pleased to welcome the members of the Lourdes pilgrimage organized by the Maltese Association for the Transport of the Infirm. My greeting also goes to the pilgrims from the Archdiocese of Atlanta. Upon all the English-speaking visitors, especially the groups from Indonesia, Taiwan and the United States, I cordially invoke the joy and peace of Jesus Christ our Saviour.

Copyright © Libreria Editrice Vaticana

---

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana