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EDITORIAL: *REDEMPTORIS MATER* AND THE DOMESTIC CHURCH

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... Our Lady knew neither triumph nor miracle. Her Son preserved her from the least tip-touch of the savage wing of human glory. No one has ever lived, suffered, died in such simplicity, in such deep ignorance of her own dignity, a dignity crowning her above angels. For she was born without sin - in what amazing isolation! A pool so clear, so pure, that even her own image - created only for the sacred joy of the Father - was not to be reflected. The Virgin was Innocence.

*- Georges Bernanos,
Diary of a Country Priest*



IN THE EYES OF THE WORLD, WHAT COULD BE MORE “UNTRENDY” OR MORE “unecumenical” than an encyclical on Mary? To the mind of the Holy Father, however, this is exactly what the Spirit ordered. After his major encyclicals on the Son, the Father and the Holy Spirit, what else could we logically expect but a profound meditation upon the woman who was mother to the Son, daughter to the Father and spouse to the Holy Spirit? God’s greatest masterpiece held within the divine mind from all eternity, whose entire life has been enfolded in the infinite mystery of triune love. In what is arguably his most beautiful encyclical, the Pope lifts us out of a world preoccupied with the latest fads and bids us to reflect upon such themes as:

- the third millennium of Christianity;
- Mary’s pivotal role in human history;
- the 1200th year anniversary of the last world-wide ecumenical council at Nicea in 787;
- the 1000th year anniversary of the baptism of Prince Vladimir of Kiev;
- Mary as *Mater Ecclesiae*, who shows us the way to Christian unity;
- the timeliness of St. Louis Marie Grignion de Montfort, whose Marian spirituality is endorsed as “an effective means for Christians to live faithfully their baptismal commitments.”

The world may forget these great events and profound truths but heaven does not; and fortunately for Christendom, the Vicar of Christ has not forgotten.

In this encyclical, John Paul II proclaimed a Marian year to emphasize “the special presence of the Mother of God in the mystery of Christ and his Church.” The year runs from Pentecost, 1987 to the Solemnity of the Assumption, 1988. It began in a magnificent way: on a warm summer evening in Rome’s most ancient basilica dedicated to the

Blessed Virgin, Santa Maria Maggiore. As the last rays of sunlight left the hills of Latium, John Paul II, on the eve of Pentecost (June 6) led millions of people around the world in a recitation of our Lady's Rosary. Watching this event, which was broadcast world-wide, one could not help but experience the catholicity of the Church and the confluence of time and eternity as the Christian world turned toward heaven contemplating the "great sign" spoken of by the Apocalypse. What a moment of grace for the Church and the world!

It is no coincidence that the Synod on the Laity will be taking place during the Marian Year. In fact, a number of prominent ecclesiastics have spoken out about how truly fitting it is. Archbishop Jan Schotte, Secretary General for the Synod of Bishops, when he presented the *Instrumentum Laboris*, stated:

When the Holy Father made the unexpected announcement of the pro-clamation of the Marian Year during the Eucharistic celebration of 1 January 1987, not a few immediately perceived the importance of the Synod on the Laity situated within this Marian Year Every Synod recalls the experience of the Cenacle when the Apostles united in prayer with the Lord's Mother, to open their minds and hearts to the gift of the Spirit and to initiate the mission which the Lord had entrusted to his Church.

The Synod's theme - the vocation and mission of the laity in the Church and in the world - will be enriched by that reference to the Mother of God. Mary, in welcoming with perfect faith the incarnation of the Son of God in this world, by living the mysteries of her life in continual relationship with the Saviour, and bowing humbly before the events of the world from the time of the hidden life at Nazareth, has become the model for every Christian. Her singular vocation witnesses to the grandeur of the life of the Christian lay person called to participate in the redemptive power through free and personal adherence to grace.

The Second Vatican Council, in its decree on the apostolate of the laity, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, stated that "family cares should not be foreign to their spirituality." It is in that basic unit of society, the Christian family, frequently referred to as the domestic church, that the Council speaks of the importance of Mary for the spiritual life of the layman. The Council Fathers stress this

vital link, stating:

Perfect model of this apostolic spiritual life is the Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen of Apostles. While on earth her life was like that of any other, filled with labors and the cares of the home; always, however, she remained intimately united to her Son and cooperated in an entirely unique way in the Saviour's work. And now, assumed into heaven, "her motherly love keeps her attentive to her Son's brothers, still on pilgrimage amid the dangers and difficulties of life, until they arrive at the happiness of the fatherland." Everyone should have a genuine devotion to her and entrust his life to her motherly care.

The theme of our Lady's domestic duties during the hidden life in Nazareth is very much central to the Holy Father's encyclical. He speaks of our Lady's "pilgrimage of faith" which serves as a model for the whole Church. Here the Pope is referring to that interior journey which comprises the history of a soul. What I found of particular interest was the frequent references to Mary's pilgrimage of faith as *it was made in the home at Nazareth*. Here the Holy Father appears to be drawing upon and developing the teaching of the Second Vatican Council. The "obedience of faith" (Rm. 16:26) found perfect fulfillment in the Virgin of Nazareth who was called "blessed" by the Spirit-filled Elizabeth because she "believed."

Indeed, at the Annunciation Mary entrusted herself to God completely, with the "full submission of intellect and will," manifesting "the obedience of faith" to him who spoke to her through his messenger. She responded, therefore, with all her human and feminine "I", and this response of faith included both perfect cooperation with "the grace of god that precedes and assists" and perfect openness to the action of the Holy Spirit, who "constantly brings faith to completion by his gifts."

After briefly discussing the birth, the presentation in the temple, the Magi and the flight into Egypt, the Pope centers his treatment of Mary's "obedience of faith" *in the home* in Nazareth. We offer here a portion of this beautiful passage:

When the Holy Family returns to Nazareth after Herod's death, there begins the long period of the hidden life. She "who believed that there would be fulfillment of what was spoken to her

from the Lord” (Lk. 1:45) lives the reality of these words day by day. And daily at her side is the son to whom “she gave the name Jesus” ; therefore in contact with him she certainly uses this name, a fact which would have surprised no one, since the name had long been in use in Israel. Nevertheless, Mary knows that he who bears the name Jesus has been called by the angel “the Son of the Most High”. Mary knows she has conceived and given birth to him “without having a husband,” by power of the Most High who overshadowed her. Therefore Mary knows that the Son to whom she gave birth in a virginal manner is precisely that “Holy One,” the Son of God, of whom the angel spoke to her.

During the years of Jesus’ hidden life in the house at Nazareth, Mary’s life too is “hid with Christ in God” through faith. For faith is contact with the ineffable mystery of God made man, a mystery that surpasses everything revealed in the Old Covenant. From the moment of the Annunciation, the mind of the Virgin-Mother has been initiated into the radical “newness” of God’s self-revelation and has been made aware of the mystery. She is the first of those “little ones” of whom Jesus will say one day: “Father, . . . you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes” (Mt. 11:25). For “no one knows the Son except the Father” (Mt. 11:27) She is therefore blessed, because “she has believed,” and continues to believe day after day amidst all the trials and the adversities of Jesus’ infancy and then during the years of the hidden life at Nazareth, where he “was obedient to them” (Lk. 2:51). He was obedient both to Mary and also to Joseph, since Joseph took the place of his father in people’s eyes; for this reason, the Son of Mary was regarded by the people as “the carpenter’s son” (Mt. 13:55).... Living side by side with her Son under the same roof, and faithfully persevering “in her union with her Son,” she “advanced in her pilgrimage of faith, “ as the Council emphasizes.

Here we can see beautifully why Mary is the perfect model of that domestic spirituality which is proper to the layman. Although Mary did not need to look up to behold heaven since she was given the grace to look down and behold heaven in her arms, in a very real sense she still shared all our joys and sorrows, particularly those

which are common to the Christian family. Every Christian parent who has known the joy of holding their infant child, of hearing that child utter its first words, of seeing him begin to walk, can know that these joys were known and are shared by that family of Nazareth. As that same family also knows the pain of exile, violence and the loss of a loved one, whether spouse or child. Like Mary and Joseph, Christian parents must practice that “obedience of faith” through which the domestic church may be sanctified. It is significant that the Holy Father stresses the obedience of Faith which for the Catholic means fidelity to God’s word as found in Scripture and spoken through the Church. This is important at a time when so many Christian families have allowed the spirit of the world to invade the sanctuary of the home. As a consequence of this, we find that many are evangelized by the surrounding apostate culture rather than by the peace and salvation which only Christ can bring.

When treating of Mary at the center of the pilgrim Church, the Pope returns once again to the domestic Church at Nazareth.

For the Church of that time and of every time Mary is a singular witness to the years of Jesus’ infancy and hidden life at Nazareth, when she “kept all these things, pondering them in her heart” (Lk. 2:19).... Mary followed Jesus step by step in her maternal pilgrimage of faith. She followed him during the years of his hidden life at Nazareth.



These passages have great relevance for that “pilgrimage of faith” which most Christian laymen find in the family. due to the widespread crisis of faith, the Pope is frequently exhorting the faithful, especially Christian families, to regain that supernatural vision of life in which the basic duties of life in the home can be consecrated and transformed into prayerful action. the Christian home of today, like the home in Nazareth, must be a sanctuary of prayer. If we view things in a Christ-like way, we can see that the Christian home is one of the true centers of world history where souls are shaped and prepared for their eternal destiny. This is the Christian vision of reality which the Holy Father recently recalled to minds illumined by faith.

The true centres of the world and of salvation are not the busy capital cities which are the hubs of politics and business, of money and worldly power. The true centres of history are the quiet places where people go to pray. That is where the earthly world comes into particularly close contact with the supernatural world, the Church of pilgrimage on earth with the eternal and victorious Church of heaven. There, far greater things are done and far more crucial decisions are made affecting life and death than in the world's capitals, where people think they have their finger on the pulse of time and turn the wheels of history.

So at this crucial moment in world history, let

us take advantage of this great year of grace and pray fervently for the success of the upcoming Synod. With Mary's intercession, may the Christian laity fulfill their vocation and turn the secular tide, to restore all things in Christ. Our Lord, through his Vicar, beckons us to turn to Mary, "the woman clothed with the sun," as our sure hope of the final victory. Let us plead to that maternal heart which is also a virginal heart, to give us that peace which the world cannot give. Let us pray to her as we should!

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Feast of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel

