

RECONCILIATION IN CHRIST AND MARY, MOTHER OF RECONCILIATION*

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At the dawn of the Christian era, the inhabitants of Malta welcomed in their midst two great exponents of the Christian faith. They welcomed Paul, the Apostle of the Gentiles, who brought with him "the word of reconciliation", and they greeted Luke, Paul's fellow-worker and Christianity's first Marian doctor.

Today Malta is welcoming numerous other distinguished visitors. They come from many countries on the footsteps of Paul and Luke to honour Mary, Mother of reconciliation. The Church which is in Malta welcomes them as brethren in the faith and joins them in praying for reconciliation at home and abroad.

The mention of reconciliation will probably bring to mind the painful thought of the many divisions that exist in our society and in the world. One thinks in this connection of divisions both between individuals or groups and between classes, races and states. One will of course remember the unfortunate division of the world in rival blocs, and the consequent cold war and arms race. One will certainly not forget the bloody conflicts that from time to time flare up in one place or another, some of which are raging even now while we are speaking. There are then the innumerable acts of terrorism, violence and crime, the exploitation and the oppression of millions of people, and the widespread violation of the fundamental rights of man. One is tempted to say that in our strife-ridden world there seems to be no end to man's inhumanity to man. All well-meaning men would like these evils to stop once and for all. All are anxious to see bad relations being replaced by concord, hostility by peace, and tension by cooperation. To many people this is what reconciliation is all about.

However, as Christians we are bound to go considerably further than that. In fact we are convinced that, underlying all the divisions which exist within man and among men, there is a more radical rift that ultimately accounts for them, and that therefore needs to be healed before all else. It is of course the tragic rift between man and his Maker. By neglecting God and God's law, as he notoriously does, man is bound to harm himself and his neighbour. It therefore follows that there can be no true reconciliation and no lasting peace among men unless and until man reconciles himself to God.

* Text of a conference given on 16th September, 1983 at the Catholic Institute, Floriana, Malta, to the XVI International Marian Congress.

Such reconciliation changes man's whole attitude. It involves what Scripture calls a change of heart. Can man do as much all by himself?

According to Scripture the reconciliation of man to God is God's own exclusive initiative, and a pure gift of grace. In granting this gift, God behaves toward man as a father toward his son.

God's Fatherhood

The natural rapport between father and son is one of the noblest of human relations. On the side of the father it is characterised by generous, constant love. It may happen, and sometimes it does happen that the son is ungrateful or undeserving. Despite that, the father does not cease to be father. He has an inner need to be consistent with his nature as father, and therefore to be faithful in love. So he does not rest until his son is reconciled and reciprocates his love. There is a very moving example of this in the Second Book of Samuel (ch. 18). Absalom had revolted against David, his father, and sought his life to usurp his throne. A fierce battle followed between him and his father's supporters, while David impatiently waited for the outcome. To be sure, he did not much care for success; all he was anxious about was the safety of his son. When news was brought to him of Absalom's death, he could not be consoled. His grief for the loss of his unworthy son turned victory into bitterness.

Scripture sees this kind of fatherly feeling as an analogy of God's loving care for sinful man. By sin man commits treason against God's majesty. Yet God's faithful love for man does not slack, sin notwithstanding. Like a true father, God is merciful, clement and ready to forgive. He truly cares for man and is all bent to retrieve and to save him.

From their experience of God's dealings with them, the ancient Israelites learned to call God their Father. Thus, for example, one of their prophets addresses God, saying: "Thou art our Father . . . Thou, O Lord, art our Father; our Redeemer from of old is thy name" (Is 63,16. Cf Dt 14,1; Jer 31,9).

Unlike the heathens of their time, the ancient Israelites did not think of God's fatherhood in their regard in a naturalistic or mythic sense, as if they were his physical offspring. Instead they thought of God's fatherhood in terms of his election of them as his People and of his covenant with them. To call God their Father was for them a way of saying that he had created them as a People, wanted to save them, and showed them abiding love and mercy. The same title also reminded them of their obligation to be faithful to the covenant, to obey God's law, and to respect one another. So the prophet Malachi asks: "Have we not all one Father? Has not God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our fathers?" (Mal 2,10).

Although to a large extent this idea of the fatherhood of God was metaphorical, it was taken up and further developed by Jesus in the New Testament. It recurs like a leit motif in the gospels, but nowhere is it put to

better use than in the well-known parable of the prodigal son (Lk 15). The father in that parable is an offended man who, nevertheless, counts for nought the offence received, if only he can retrieve his fugitive son. When at last that son comes back, he does not find an angry father who needs to be reconciled. Instead he finds a longing father, who not only accepts him as he is, but also embraces him with out-stretched arms and celebrates his return with festive joy. By this, Jesus intends to say that God is like that father: he does not need to be reconciled to the sinner, but the other way round. However, in the second part of the parable concerning the reaction of the elder son, Jesus suggests other ideas as well. In Jesus' account, the relations of the two sons to their father are apparently very different: the younger son deserts his father, while the elder son stays always with him. Yet Jesus shows that the difference is more apparent than real. Despite his staying always in his father's home, the elder son remained a complete stranger to the feelings of his father. Misjudging his father's heart, he ended by offending his father no less grievously than his brother had done, not indeed by abandoning his father, but by despising his father's other son. He was therefore as unworthy of his father's love as his brother. By the example of these brothers, Jesus seems to suggest two things: he suggests that all the sons of our heavenly Father are in one way or another unworthy of his gratuitous love and consequently need forgiveness; he further makes it very clear that any man's reconciliation to God demands his unstinting reconciliation to his brother. This latter point was so important to Jesus that he repeated it many times in different contexts. On one occasion he admonished his listeners with the well-known words, saying: "If you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift" (Mt 5,23 – 24).

Having thus drawn from the old idea of God's fatherhood all its practical consequences, Jesus began to develop it further, until he gave it a new and deeper meaning. Jesus struck his contemporaries by calling God "Abba, Father". The term expressed the greatest intimacy with God. Never had a Jew dared to address God like that. Furthermore, though publicly referring to God as the Father of all men, Jesus nevertheless carefully distinguished between "My Father and your Father" (Cf Jn 20,17). He taught his disciples how to pray God calling him Father, but he never joined them in commonly saying "Our Father" with them. Thus in various ways he suggested that his relationship to God was different from theirs. Indeed God was his Father not metaphorically, as in their case, but truly in a strictly proper sense. Hence in Jesus' own and exclusive regard, the fatherhood of God was revealed as a mysterious sublime reality. Jesus was in truth the only-begotten Son of God. He alone knew the Father and therefore could reveal him. The work which the Father had given him to do was to reveal his name.

The revelation of the Father in the Son shone with full brightness when

Jesus rose from the dead and gave the Spirit to his disciples. It then also transpired that “to those who received him, who believed in his name, Jesus gave the power to become children of God” (Jn 1,12). Thus the full revelation of the fatherhood of God uncovered new depths of meaning in God’s initiative to reconcile man. On the part of God, reconciliation meant the sending in the world of God’s incarnate Son. On the part of man it meant the elevation to the dignity of adoptive divine sonship.

Reconciliation in the Son

The incarnation of the Son can only be described as God’s most decisive step to reconcile man. In Jesus Christ, the Son of God became the Son of Man. He “who is in the bosom of the Father” (Jn 1,18) was “born of woman” (Gal 4,4). He who was “in the form of God” put on the “form of servant” (Phil 2,6f). He who “reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature” (Heb 1,3) came “in the likeness of sinful flesh” (Rom 8,3). For indeed “the Word was made flesh” (Jn 1,14). When that happened, the two extremes – God and man – were joined together and united in a single person. That hypostatic union was a covenant of friendship; it meant irreversible peace. Hence the incarnation of the Son is the radical reconciliation of God and man.

God had previously communicated with men many times and in various ways. Israel had experienced this saving presence and boasted that no other nation had gods as near to her as Yahweh was close to her. She could point to the tent of the meeting, the pillar of cloud or of fire, the ark and especially the Temple as eloquent symbols of God’s presence in her midst. She was also justly proud of possessing God’s word – the Law and the prophetic words. Undeniably all these were remarkable signs of God’s favour. Yet they all almost pale into insignificance when compared to what God did in Jesus Christ. For Jesus is the Immanuel, God-with-us. In him “all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell” (Col 1,19). His human flesh is a sacrament of “the image of the invisible God” (Col 1,15). It is a sign and instrument of God himself personally present among men. Jesus was the true and living Temple of God. Henceforth communication with the Father was to be in and through him.

The Son whom the Father sent in the flesh communicated with men by sharing their life and by being like them in all things except sin. Unlike the Baptist, who withdrew to the desert, Jesus mixed with men, visited them in their homes, and regularly shared table-fellowship with them. Some were even scandalised by such closeness and called him the friend of publicans and sinners. He in fact saw himself as the physician tending the sick or as the shepherd looking for the stray sheep.

By whatever he did Jesus promoted the reconciliation of men to God. He announced the gospel of salvation to the poor. He healed the sick, cast out devils and forgave sins. To the outcasts and the despised, and to all whom the Father drew to him, he gave an unprecedented sense of liberation

and hope. In his presence and actions men experienced a unique saving encounter with God.

Jesus achieved the liberation of men when, like the Good Shepherd he was, he freely gave his life for those he loved. Scripture affirms that the shedding of Jesus' blood and his death on the cross were necessary for the reconciliation of men to God. Why was it so, one may ask? Was it to render God propitious to men? Scripture clearly shows that this was not the case. We read in fact:

"For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed, says the Lord, who has compassion on you" (Is 54,10).

"I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you" (Jer 31,3).

"As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear him" (Ps 103,13).

"Can a woman forget her suckling child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even if these may forget, yet I will not forget you. Behold, I have graven you on the palms of my hands" (Is 49,15 – 16).

So God is not an angry avenger meting out punishment for offences received. On the contrary he is a loving Father who seeks reconciliation and effectively procures it. It is he who shows mercy and forgives. It is equally he who provides for the expiation or purification of sins.

The means which God provides to wipe away men's sins, strange as it may seem to us, is the blood of his incarnate Son. In fact, as is well known, blood to the ancient Israelites meant life, and life, according to Scripture, belongs to God alone. Wherefore Scripture says that there is no remission of sins without the shedding of blood (Cf Hebr 9,22). To give us life, which sin destroys, the Father therefore gave us the pure blood of his sinless Son. In love exceedingly great, he thought fit to display his beloved Son on the cross as our propitiatory, that is as our means of expiation. On the cross of Jesus, therefore, the Father does not pronounce condemnation but proclaims pardon. The cross is not the gallows of angry revenge, but the new mercy seat. It is our reconciliation, indeed our at-one-ment with the Father.

Speaking of the liberating function of the blood and of the death of Jesus, Scripture often employs metaphorical terms, like ransom and redemption, or debt, purchase and the paying of a price. We should not mistake the true meaning of these metaphors.

When the Son of God became the Son of Man, in all things like us except for sin, death was already implied in the fact that he took to himself our perishable flesh; only, since he was the sinless Son of God, his death had the power to overcome the power of our death and the sin which had brought it about. Jesus' death on the cross was therefore not a punishment which he, being innocent, bore in place of the guilty. He submitted to death freely and in obedience to the Father. "No one takes away my life from

me", he declared, "but I lay it down of my own accord" (Jn 10,18). But the laying down of his life was an act of unique significance. The Spirit of the Father who was in him had always led the man Jesus to a progressively higher degree of love. In the end the same Spirit led him to the supreme act of love whereby, in obedience and total trust, Jesus dedicated or, as he put it, consecrated himself totally and unreservedly to the Father for the sake of men. By that total self-dedication, he renounced his human life in perfect love. No man could possibly achieve that much, except the man Jesus, who was the Son of God. Jesus' act of perfect submission to the Father belonged indeed to the divine person of the Son; nevertheless it came from the ambit of men. It therefore effectively re-established within the ambit of men the long-impaired sovereignty of God, re-dedicating men to God, that is reconciling them to the Father. In other words by his obedience unto death, Jesus nailed to his cross the bill of our debt accruing to us from our disobedience, showing that it was no longer accounted to us.

So on the cross of Jesus the gift which the Father had given us in the Son was returned to him as a fragrant sacrificial offering. It was a "pure offering" (Mal 1,11) made to the Father by the Son "in whom he is well pleased" (Mt 3,17). It could not but be agreeable to him. When the Father accepted it and truly made it his own, the work of men's reconciliation to God was achieved. For the Son returned to the Father carrying with him his inseparably assumed human nature. By his return to the Father he therefore introduced into the royal court of God something coming from the ambit of men. That was indeed the break-through whereby the goal of reconciliation had been reached.

As the high Priest of the future good things that were to come, Jesus entered with his blood into the tabernacle "not made by human hands, because it is not of this creation" (Heb 9,11). This was his entry into his glorified humanity, permeated and transfigured by the Spirit. In the resurrection of Jesus the definitive eschatological salvation, to which reconciliation was to lead, had begun. Thus in the mystery of his incarnate Son, God reversed our relation to him. Jesus became "our reconciliation" and "our peace" (Eph 2,14). In him we have access to the Father.

Adoptive sonship

In order that man may personally make his own what the Father accomplished for him in the Son, he needs to adhere to Christ. To receive the word of reconciliation in fact means to be called to faith in Jesus Christ. To let oneself be reconciled is to confess the Lord Jesus and be baptized in his name.

By this faith, extending and perfecting itself by hope and love, man obtains justification: his sins are forgiven, he puts off the old man of sin and puts on Jesus Christ. This change is comparable to a re-birth: the justified man is born again from on high and becomes a new creature. Henceforth he guards Christ's words and obeys his commandments. Christ

therefore remains in him. So the Father loves him, and together with the Son and the Spirit comes to him and dwells in him. The Spirit which is given to him inwardly configures him to the image of the Son, so that he may become an adoptive son of God. In his new life in the Spirit the justified man enjoys the liberty of the children of God. Love poured in him by the Spirit unites him in filial communion with the Father and in loving fellowship with his brethren.

Such then is the result of God's initiative, the end and the meaning of reconciliation: to confer, that is, on the formerly estranged demoted sinner the exalted status and dignity of an adoptive son of God.

Meantime, all who receive the Spirit of adoption become members of the household of God. They commonly share in the unity of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. In the communion of one spiritual family, the assembly of God's adoptive children is "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people" (1Pt 2,9). It is the Church of the Father, the mystical Body of the Son, and the Temple of the Holy Spirit. For this reason it is a universal sacrament of salvation, a sign and an instrument of men's communion with God and of the unity of mankind.

After Jesus had accomplished his task of reconciliation, as the Father had sent him into the world, so he sent his disciples into the world, saying: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations . . . teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Mt 28,19f). "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who will not believe will be condemned" (Mk 16,16). To this he added: "I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide" (Jn 15,16). "By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit" (Jn 15,8). Speaking to the Father in the presence of the disciples, he said: "I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them whom thou hast given me, because they are thine . . . And not for them only do I pray, but for them also who through their word shall believe in me: that they all may be one, as thou, Father, in me, and I in thee: that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (Jn 17,9.20 – 21).

Jesus expected his Church to grow like a mustard seed. He envisaged her as the light of the world and the salt of the earth. He compared her influence among men to that of leaven inside meal. But he also foresaw the difficulties that his emissaries would encounter. He therefore told them, saying: "Peace I leave to you; my peace I give you; not as the world gives do I give to you" (Jn 14,27). "Because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you" (Jn 15,19). "In the world you have tribulation" (Jn 16,33). Jesus therefore urged them to seek comfort and strength in prayer, saying: "If you ask anything of the Father, he will give it to you . . . Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full" (Jn 16,23f). He promised them his unfailing help and the gift of the Spirit, and assured them of victory and reward. "Be of good cheer", he said, "I have overcome the world" (Jn 16,33). "In my Father's house are many rooms . . . I go to prepare a place for you" (Jn 14,2). So Jesus prayed

for them, saying: "Father, I desire that they also, whom thou hast given me, may be with me where I am, to behold my glory, which thou hast given me before the foundation of the world" (Jn 17,24).

Mary and reconciliation

The task of carrying the word of reconciliation to the ends of the earth is contemporary to every generation of Jesus' disciples. In carrying it out by proclaiming the word, by ministering the sacraments of the faith, and by exercising the "diaconia caritatis", the Church looks to the "Father of all mercies and the God of all consolation" (2Cor 1,3) and daily prays: "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Mt 6,10). She looks to the Lord Jesus, "the apostle and high priest of our confession" (Heb 1,3), whose priestly ministry of reconciliation she participates. She trusts in the Spirit of Jesus, the "Spirit of truth" (Jn 16,13) and of unity, author of holiness, and distributor of gifts to all her members. At the same time, in the communion of saints the Church is deeply attached to Mary, the Mother of Jesus whom with St Anselm our Congress invokes as Mother of reconciliation.

We therefore now would like to ask: Why is it that, in her thought and affection, in her work and in her prayer the Church links together Mary and reconciliation? The reason is of course the special role of Mary in salvation history: being the Mother of the Redeemer, Mary is also the Mother of the redeemed.

Earlier on we stressed that God's most decisive act to reconcile the world was the sending of his Son into the world. By that act of omnipotent grace, the divine and the human were so wonderfully reconciled that they became united and subsisting in one person. That person, being both God and man, is himself the radical reconciliation of God and man. Hence, just as by his incarnation the Son made his Mother to be the Mother of God, so he also made her to be the Mother of reconciliation. When the Word was made flesh in her womb, Mary became the Tent of the meeting where the radical reconciliation of God and man took place. By her consent in faith to be the handmaid of the Lord, the Spirit who came upon her forged within her an indissoluble bond, a new covenant of grace. Her intact virginity was the sign that this did not come about by the power of man but by the power of God. Her maternity was the means whereby the bond came into being. The bond was none other than God's and her Son. It made Mary the Ark of the New Covenant of grace and the Mother of reconciliation. Indeed, the moment she became Mother was the moment in which, according to Scripture, the Son, entering the world, cried out reconciliation in her womb, saying to the Father: "A body thou hast prepared for me . . . Lo, I come to do thy will, O God" (Heb 10,5 - 7).

The Son born to Mary did the will of the Father always, for, as he declared: "I always do the things that please him" (Jn 8,29). But he did the will of God especially when he said: "Abba, Father, all things are possible

to thee; remove this chalice from me, but not what I will, but what thou wilt" (Mk 14,36); and then, drinking the chalice which the Father had given him, he made himself "obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross" (Phil 2,8), the Father displaying him as a propitiatory for the reconciliation of the world.

As we recall this, how can we not remember also that the Son whom the Father gave up to be our propitiatory in his blood was also Mary's Son? On Calvary Mary's will in faith was united with the will of the Father that reconciliation be accomplished according to his plan. In her own way, therefore, Mary too gave up her Son for our sake. If the Father loved that Son, so also did the Mother. If — to speak in human terms — the giving of the Son in his blood made a great demand on the Father's love, so it also did on the Mother's heart. Divine providence so disposed that, by the affliction of her heart the visible Mother participated in a unique way in the revelation of the invisible Father's love for us in the sacrifice of our reconciliation on the cross.

From the pierced side of Jesus on the cross a new People was born to the Father. It comprised those whom the Father reconciled and adopted in the Son. That People could not but be related to the Mother of the Son. On the cross in fact, Jesus was the new Adam, the head of the new humanity. By his side stood the "Woman", the new Eve and true Mother of the living. Turning to his Mother, therefore, Jesus proclaimed her the Mother of those who were reborn in him as God's adoptive sons. The Mother of the Redeemer is thus also the Mother of the redeemed; the Mother of reconciliation is likewise the Mother of the reconciled.

It may perhaps seem paradoxical that foremost among the reconciled was Mary herself. In fact, in view of her exalted task, the Father anticipated for her the fruits of the redemption, and from the first instant of her life conformed her to the image of the Son. Wherefore, compared to the rest of the redeemed, Mary was reconciled in a more sublime manner. In her immaculate being, ever in filial communion with the Father, the ideal of reconciliation was uniquely real. To crown the fulness of grace with which he had adorned her, the Father also granted to her ahead of all the reconciled the full glory to which reconciliation is meant to lead. At the end of her earthly course, Mary was assumed body and soul in heaven, and so shares for ever in the glory of her risen Son.

Thus the blessed Mother of the Lord was not only intimately associated by the Father in his initiative to reconcile us in the Son, but also by grace achieved in herself the supreme fulfilment of God's project for man. For this reason she remains for all time a unique point of reference for the Church whenever she meditates the mystery of reconciliation.

Furthermore, amid the ups and downs of man's unending struggle to assert his dignity, Mary points the way to authentic achievement.

Man has been created after the image of God. He is destined to the grace of adoption as God's son. His dignity rests above all on his call to filial communion with God. He cannot live according to the truth of his being

and cannot attain genuine fulfilment unless he acknowledges God as his Father and communes with him in love. Unfortunately many of our contemporaries either fail to perceive, or else reject, this vital bond of man with God. Not infrequently men are so engrossed with the concerns of this world that they seem to leave no room for God in their lives. There are also those whose false idea of man's freedom and autonomy leads them to reject any dependence on God. Mary's achievement by grace confounds all these. No man has ever possessed as much dignity or enjoyed as much freedom as the handmaid of the Lord, whom all generations call blessed. But her blessedness came to her precisely because of her openness to God and her receptivity to God's word. By faith too she could give her incomparable service to the world, when she became the Mother of the Prince of Peace.

When God had done great things to her, Mary "kept all these things pondering in her heart" (Lk 2,19). But, joining action to meditation, she arose and went with haste into the hill country to announce the joy of salvation. In like manner the Church of her Son does not cease to meditate the good news, and from this meditation draws zeal and energy to carry the word of reconciliation to the ends of the earth.

That word was impressively announced by Jesus for the first time when he went up on a mountain and called blessed those who are poor in spirit, those who are meek and merciful, those who hunger and thirst after justice, those who work for peace. Need we be reminded that in all this the Lord Jesus sang above all the praises of his Mother? No one exemplified the beatitudes as she did. She was indeed the first and the perfect disciple of God's kingdom. With good reason all the other disciples look to her with admiration and are stimulated by her example.

Among other things, Mary reminds all who seek peace of the radical demands of the gospel of her Son. In a world where extreme poverty exists side by side with enormous wealth; at a time when the powerful few lord it over innumerable multitudes, Mary unequivocally declares her option for the poor and takes her stand emphatically on the side of the oppressed. How out-spoken she is on justice, when she declares that God filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty handed! How vigorously she professes the strength of God's arm against the proud in the imagination of their heart! How intrepidly she proclaims the downfall of the mighty and the exaltation of the lowly! How confidently she recounts God's mercy on those who fear him!

By the strength of her character and, even more so, by the "fruit of her womb" (Lk 1,42), Mary affirms the dignity of her sex. In an age so sensitive on this matter, is she not a timely reminder that in the family of our heavenly Father, just as there is no master or slave, so there is also neither male nor female? Furthermore, in that same family Mary holds the place of Mother. Hers is therefore a unifying role. Her divided children in this day and age should rally round her as did her Son's first disciples who "with one accord devoted themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary, the Mother of Jesus" (Acts 1,14).

The Church rallies round this Mother in all her needs, knowing from experience her motherly care and effective aid. But she gathers round her most of all in time of tribulation and distress. As Jesus predicted, the Church in the world is bound to suffer persecution; that is the price she has to pay for continuing his task of reconciliation. In time of harassment or persecution, the Church is closest to the cross of Jesus and therefore to his afflicted Mother. From both she draws inspiration and strength to respond with courage and fortitude, forgiveness and love.

Jesus assured his disciples, saying: "Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven" (Mt 5,11). That reward shone in the glaring light of his resurrection and of his Mother's assumption. It continues to lift up in hope the hearts of his brethren on their way to the home of their Father.

Confident in that hope, we thank our merciful Father for having reconciled us in his Son. We thank him for having adopted us as his sons and called us to peace with him and with one another. We also thank him for having given us a Mother who, by her example and by her powerful intercession, continues to sustain us in our efforts for the reconciliation of the world.

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