



A Pastoral Letter by His Excellency Mgr Mario Grech Bishop of Gozo

LET US ENTRUST OURSELVES TO OUR MOTHER MARY

Today, as we celebrate *Mother's Day*, I would like to salute all mothers. Words fail me in trying to convey what a mother is. But it would be enough to ask someone who has lost his mother to tell us what he goes through when he calls his mother and gets no reply! Of course a father has a role to play in the upbringing of the children, but a mother's presence goes beyond anything and anyone by far.

We are heavily indebted to our mother. She is the one who welcomes a new life in her womb when we are conceived, and from that moment her life becomes *one continuous act of expectation*: first she waits for us to be born, and then she is always at the door, waiting for us to come home. Who knows how many mothers there are who spend the night worrying, anxiously waiting for their children to come home! We don't have to do anything to earn her love, because a mother loves her children to distraction. She doesn't love her children because they are clever, beautiful or capable, she loves them simply just because they are her children. A mother is not enthralled by her children because they are ideal persons: she loves them because they are hers. She loves them precisely because they are hers, even if they are not physically, mentally, morally or spiritually perfect!

For children, their mother's face constitutes the universe: everything is included in her face. In her look, her children can see what is happening around them; actually her face is like a mirror in which her children can see their faces without any make-up!

How true it is that “a mother’s arms are a mother’s first countenance”.¹ Maternal arms and hands are the first to embrace us, to cuddle us, to watch over us, to treat our wounds, to bandage us, to help us rise up, to dry our tears, and to do so many other things. With these hands, a mother clothes her children and makes them cosy when they get uncovered. In other words, it is a mother’s tender arms which often keep us from ending up in a pit! Whenever the need arises, a mother is the first to offer her help.

When mother is present, we are not orphans. As Pope Francis says, a mother’s presence is the remedy for our individualistic and selfish drives which close us in on ourselves. Where mothers are absent, society loses its heart and becomes cold; when we tamper with the gift of maternity, society becomes wicked, and cold calculation and speculation take the place of a welcoming attitude to life, replacing love, mercy and compassion.² A mother knows how to light up the flame of hope in a heart engulfed in darkness; mothers are the future of society.

One can consider with profit the comment by a lay Orthodox theologian about a society which does not value maternity: “contemporary society is profoundly masculine and the female charism is of no importance to it, it is a society without God, because He cannot be born in it without her presence”.³

If all this and more applies to our mothers, how much more can we apply it to our heavenly Mother, Mary of Nazareth. From the moment that on Calvary, Jesus entrusted his beloved disciple to her, Mary became the Mother of all men. Mary is the Mother who always waits for her children in order to reveal Jesus to them and help them follow him. We don’t have to do anything to earn her love because she loves us all, not because we are perfect but simply because we are her children. Mary loves us all, but she has a special fondness for those who are spiritually tired or who have gone astray. Hers are the arms which embrace us lovingly and which warm us when we feel cold. Just as she helped Christ carry the cross, so today she intervenes to help us bear life’s heavy crosses. If, as Pope Francis has said, the Church is like “a field hospital in battle”, so Mary is like that nurse who does not stop

¹ MASSIMO RECALATI, *Le mani della madre*, 2015.

² FRANCIS, *Homily*, 1 January, 2017.

³ PAUL EVDOKIMOV, *Woman and the salvation of the world*, 251.

tending whoever is morally and spiritually wounded. In her face we see the reflection of what our face should look like: a peaceful and serene face, reflecting one's interior life.

In this Marian Year, I would dearly like all of us to experience the maternal love of Mary, Mother of Jesus. Because the surer we are that Mary is our Mother, the more we can distance ourselves from the state of being "spiritual orphans". Indeed, we can sometimes experience moments of crisis in our spiritual life: when we feel that God no longer exudes a good taste; when we lose all interest in all matters having to do with God; when we neglect the sacraments because we no longer find meaning in them; when we no longer find joy in prayer; and when we face other such spiritual challenges. A society and a Church which are spiritual orphans will get ever closer to the tomb, not only because God's absence is too heavy to bear, but also because there is a real risk, once the parents are no more, that brethren will no longer remain brethren and the harmony within an ecclesial community will be dissolved.

So that our Church on this Marian Island may long remain under the protection of Mary, our Mother, and at the same time, following her example, that she may continue to grow as Mother Church, spiritually and materially supporting man in today's age, I would like to call upon the ecclesial community to gather in the National Sanctuary of Ta' Pinu on this coming Whitsunday, so that together we may entrust our Diocese to Our Lady. In doing so we put ourselves into her hands so that she may lead us to Jesus. It was Jesus himself who in the person of St John entrusted us to Mary our Mother. As St Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort says, "devotion to the Virgin Mary is necessary only in order that one may find Jesus Christ entirely, love him with all one's heart and serve him faithfully".⁴ Just as in the Cenacle the Holy Spirit confirmed Mary's maternity as she was gathered there together with the Apostles and the women "all praying together with one heart" (Acts 1:14), so on Whitsunday we will call upon the Holy Spirit to keep us united with Mary our Mother. Just as early on, the Holy Spirit inspired the Apostles to broaden the arms of Mother Church by choosing seven deacons to take care of widows (Acts 6), so let us call upon Him to

⁴ *Treatise on the True Devotion*, 62.

inspire our Church to choose those options which favour today's *orphans*.

So, to prepare ourselves for this day, I urge our priests and religious, together with our lay societies, especially the Legion of Mary, to spread the beautiful teachings of St Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort concerning the consecration of ourselves to Jesus through Mary's hands. And in an Ecumenical spirit, I appeal to all Christians, even to the non-Catholic Christian communities present in Gozo, so that they may similarly solemnly entrust themselves not only as individuals but also as families, groups, religious and parochial communities, schools, clubs, etc.

In the Russian collection of writings by Eastern spiritual teachers known as the *Philokalia*, the story is told of St Gregory the Sinaite who once asked St Maximus (Capsolvite) whether he had obtained the grace of prayer. With lowered head St Maximus replied that once, while praying wholeheartedly before an image of Our Lady, he blew a kiss and then felt a shudder in his heart: he next saw what seemed like a fire emanating from the image. Rather than experiencing a burning sensation, he felt refreshed, and his heart was filled with gentleness. His heart never stopped praying from that day on.⁵ The mystic St Seraphim from Sarov, known as "flesh from Mary", also experienced the same kind of emotion. When praying, he would salute the Holy Trinity by reciting the *Glory be* before an icon of Our Lady, convinced that as the Mediatrix of his supplications, Mary would present his prayer to the Trinity.⁶

From the bottom of my heart I pray the Holy Spirit that our trusting entreaties to Mary our Mother may grant us an inkling of the joy experienced by these saints.

Given today, from the Bishop's Curia, Victoria, Gozo, on Wednesday 8th May 2019, on the liturgical commemoration of Our Lady of Pompei.

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⁵ *Philokalia*, 5, YMCA-Press, 1988, p. 473.

⁶ *Seraphim the Servant of God*, Moscow, 1995, p. 131.