

"I am watchful"

The eighth world gathering of young people called together by Pope John Paul II took place at Czestochowa on Jasna Gora (the Bright Mountain) in Poland during the middle of August, 1991. It was the largest gathering of youth the world had seen, attracting over a million and a half young people from at least 80 different countries. Pope John Paul described the gathering as a "turning point in history", and on the eve of the feast of the Assumption he led the pilgrims in a personally-written reflection on the three symbols at the shrine of Jasna Gora: the Bible, the Cross, and the Icon of Our Lady. He linked each of the three symbols to the three phrases in the Old Slavonic "Call of Jasna Gora", a prayer which is said each evening at the shrine: *Tebje prjestojim, pametiwiji, Jesm bydeszte* - "I am standing by you, I am remembering, I am watchful". The phrase "I am watchful" he applied particularly to the Icon of Mary, whom he saw as present in the church with the attitude of a mother, whose life is spent watching over her family: watching with faith, with joy, with concern, with sadness, with satisfaction, with compassion, with hope. The image of Mary as the mother watching touches a deep chord with Marists. It would not be difficult to see a likeness between the church as it emerged in the beginning and the church as it re-emerges in many places today. And it would not be difficult to see a likeness between the role of Mary the woman of faith, submerged among the people of God, unnoticed but offering strength by the sheer force of her faith, and the role of Marian disciples of Jesus today, whose main vocation is to watch, in faith, solidarity, hope, compassion and concern, with the heart of the mother who stands and waits. Gaston Lessard puts another picture before us: "I still have before me the image of a child I saw in Ticoman in November, 1983. The Chiquihuite hill is one of the many hills surrounding Mexico City, along the sides of which shantytowns creep up, providing shelter for hundreds of thousands of people. A Mexican Marist accompanied me there on a Saturday morning. At a corner, in the open space, all by herself, lost, there stood a girl who could have been twelve or fourteen years old, skinny, poorly fed, in shabby clothes, and in the last months of her pregnancy. Suppose we take her as a symbol of Mary in the new-born Church, or rather, of the new-born Church itself, of which Mary is the figure, what happens to our meditation on our role in the church being born?"

September 17, 1849

Father Colin said: "It is in the midst of this century that the Blessed Virgin shows herself. She is saying to us: 'My children, it is not you who chose yourselves, it is I who chose you. I know your weakness, your troubles. The enemies you have to overcome are no less numerous, no less to be feared than those the apostles encountered. They are perhaps even more fearsome.... But I am with you.'"

The Mayet Memoirs

Woman of strength

Look at the way the Holy Spirit portrays Mary in Scripture. She is a real person, and one of strength, charm and vivacity.... She was the "poor serving girl" who lived in a village so small that it is never mentioned in the Old Testament. She belonged to an impoverished and tiny colony in an arrogant Roman Empire. Yet how free and self-possessed she is - first questioning the angel, and then setting off in haste to Elizabeth's hill-country, 92 miles away. And what a masterpiece of prayer springs from her lips! Her magnificat song is actually a glorious chorus with the voices of over 20 Old Testament passages. The Mother of God responded to Elizabeth's greetings not by a speech but by allowing the lovingly contemplated Word of God to pour from her heart. The Holy Spirit in a few bold strokes in Luke has portrayed a valiant woman, who prayerfully contemplated God's words and deeds. And lived freely and lovingly.

Paul Glynn, sm

In solidarity

"I am watchful" expresses the attitude of the mother. Her life and her vocation are expressed in being watchful. She keeps watch over men and women from the first moments of their existence. Her keeping watch is accompanied by sadness and by joy. Among all of Christ's disciples, Mary is the first who "watches". We learn from her to be watchful, to keep watch with her: "I am near you – I remember you – I am watchful."

Pope John Paul II



The perfection accorded to Mary must not produce in us the impression that her life on earth was a kind of heavenly life, very different from ours. In reality, Mary had a life like ours. She knew the daily difficulties and trials of human life; she lived in the darkness that faith involves.

Pope John Paul II

As woman and mother, she knew in her heart the joys and sorrows of life. In Jesus' company, she lived in utter trust in the Father, even to the foot of the Cross. In the glory of the risen Christ, she becomes, in a special way, the mother of all those consecrated to God.

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