
"I come, Mother, only to see you."

MARY MUST HAVE A SIGNIFICANT PLACE in the life of the Brothers and the Mennaisian laity. At her invitation, in effect, they search to do what her Son tells them (cf. the Miracle of Canaan), and they wish at her example to be humble servants of the Lord and of those that He prefers: the smallest ones.

The celebration of the 150 years of the apparitions of the Virgin at Lourdes (France) offers an occasion to interrogate ourselves on the place that Mary has in our life, what she is for us.

With Bernadette Soubirous, the visionary with the heart of a child, let us open our eyes on the heart of Mary, our heavenly Mother. Who better than her, in effect, can help us to follow Jesus and to resemble Him in the educational service of the young? A gaze that turns towards Mary with admiration can only see Jesus in the little ones.

John Mary de la Mennais had this contemplative look. *"When I consider the glare of her holiness, and think of the perfection that she attained, I cease to be surprised at the immense power that she has on her Son, the mistress of all creatures and the fact that even the angels are full of attention to obey her... O my children, so fragile, so poor, so guilty that you be, do not be afraid to address yourself to Mary,..."*

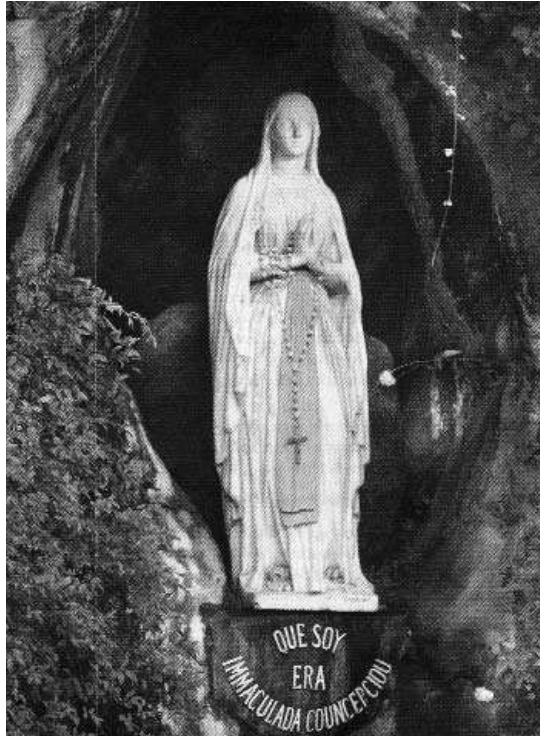
In the grace of the apparitions of Lourdes, let us learn to look at her with the astonishment of a child. The verses of the poem "The Virgin at noon" of Paul Claudel may help us to enter into communion with the sentiments of Bernadette.

*"I have nothing to offer and nothing to ask.
I come Mother only to see you'*

...

*To say nothing, only to see your face,
To let the heart sing in its own language,"*

Bernadette had this look that transforms when on 11 February 1858, accompanied by her sister and a friend, she saw Mary for the first time: *"I saw a lady dressed in white. She carried a white robe and also a white veil, a blue belt and a yellow rose on each foot."*



Her heart was so open to the grace that the ineffable light of Mary did not blind her eyes. The Bishop of Tarbes, who recognized the authenticity of the apparitions of the Virgin, mentioned it without ambiguity: *"Who would not admire, upon knowing her, the simplicity, the candor, the modesty of this child?"* Following this up, he underlines that, far from being frightened by threats, nor tempted by generous offers, Bernadette *"always in accord with herself, had in the different interrogations that she had to endure, continually maintained what she said, adding nothing and deleting nothing."*

Looking at Mary is discovering in her the "mystery" of her divine maternity and her intimate union with Jesus.

Contemplating Mary is turning ourselves humbly towards her who *"at the angels announcement, accepted in her heart and body, the Word of God and brought life to the world", she who is "recognized and honored as the true Mother of God the Redeemer."*

Looking at Mary is seeing Jesus who comes to us receiving his body from the one that God chose and prepared, that he rendered pure of all sin and to whom he gave a beauty without equal.

By raising our eyes to Mary we receive from her the radiance of the beauty of God. This is what moved so much the heart of Paul Claudel.

*"Because you are beautiful, because you are immaculate,
The woman in grace at last recovered."*

The philosopher Michel Serres said: "*Knowledge cannot do without beauty. I search for beautiful sciences.*" To this Monsignor Brugès, present Secretary of the Congregation for Catholic Education in Rome adds, "*Life cannot do without beauty.*"

We who are religious brothers or Christians, desiring to answer the call of the Spirit, can we not let ourselves be touched by the "Grace" of Mary, Mother of Jesus, Mother of God?

In Mary radiates a light of dazzling beauty, "*the femininity becomes limpid with all that it has of tenderness and of original beauty...it is made of immaculate clay. God remakes the women in her original beauty.*" Without any merit on her part, by a purely gratuitous gift of God, she is "*enveloped in the merciful and sanctifying love of God.*" Thus Mary is the Mother of Jesus, the Mother of God.

*"Ineffably intact because you are the Mother of Jesus Christ,
Who is the truth in your arms, and the only hope and the only fruit."*

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"**Que soy immaculada councepciou**" answered the Virgin to Bernadette Soubirous at Lourdes on 25 March 1858, when, on the insistence of Pastor Peyramale, she asked her for her name for the 4th time. In the words of her native "Occitan natal" she heard Mary say: "**I am the Immaculate Conception.**"

Mary identifies herself with what God wants and what He made of her willingly. She welcomes the gift of God. She adheres to it fully. She refuses nothing even the smallest thing. It is her "Grace". This gift, she makes him carry the fruit expected by God in her yes without conditions and forever.

"The formula of Lourdes reveals that the being of Mary ("I am") consists in a permanent and voluntary appropriateness of herself fully and freely given - at its very beginning. "I am, I fulfil fully the grace of my Immaculate Conception."

Mary "*has always been in communication with God, always united with Him through an eternal alliance*", affirms the Church in the definition of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, in 1854, 4 years before the apparitions of Lourdes.

Lourdes is the manifestation of this truth of the beauty of Mary before God and before men, a beauty to contemplate: the beauty of Jesus seen in His mother.

The prayer of the Rosary is a humble and good means that the Church proposes even today to contemplate the "mystery" of Jesus, God made man, born of a woman, Mother of God. In praying the Rosary, thanks to Mary who takes us with her, we let ourselves be transfigured into the image of his Son.

Bernadette teaches us this contemplative vision that converts our heart, this decentralized vision of ourselves that does not stop at things that do not figure, but that open to the ineffable. It is only thanks to this contemplation that we can follow the road of our vocation and of our life in hope and joy.

Bernadette, relating the last apparition of the Virgin, 16 July 1858, made this commentary: "*I saw only the Virgin, never have I seen her more beautiful!*"

May your beauty, Mary, be for us the reflection of the beauty and love of God for the world and for us!

"Mother of Jesus Christ, we thank you!"

Brother Yannick Houssay, S.G.

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² Paul Claudel, *La Vierge à midi*, (Œuvre Poétique Gallimard Pléiade, p. 545-546.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Mgr Laurence, évêque de Tarbes, *Mandement du 18 janvier 1862*.

⁵ *Lumen Gentium*, Concil Vatican II, no 53

⁶ Paul Claudel, *La Vierge à midi*.

⁷ Mgr Jean-Louis Brugès, art. *L'eucharistie et l'urgence du mystère*, NRTh, janvier-mars 2008, p19

⁸ Un Chartreux, *Le bonheur d'être chaste*, Presses de la renaissance, p 196

⁹ Paul Claudel, *La Vierge à midi*.

¹⁰ J.-M. Hennaux, s.j. art. *Je suis l'Immaculée Conception*, NRTh, janvier-mars 2008 p 76

¹¹ Paul Claudel, *La Vierge à midi*, conclusion.