

JOHN PAUL II

GENERAL AUDIENCE*Wednesday, September 4, 1996***The obedient slave of the Lord**

*(Reading:
chapter 1 of the Gospel of Saint Luke,
verses 39-42)*

1. The words of Mary in the Annunciation: "Behold, the handmaid of the Lord, let it be done to me according to your word" (*Lk* 1:38) reveal a characteristic attitude of Hebrew religiosity. Moses, at the beginning of the old covenant, in response to the Lord's call, had declared Himself to be His servant (see *Ex* 4:10, 14, 31). When the new covenant arrived, Mary also responded to God with an act of free submission and conscious abandonment to her will, expressing full readiness to be "the slave of the Lord".

The expression "servant" of God is applied in the Old Testament to all those who are called to exercise a mission in favor of the chosen people: Abraham (*Gn* 26, 24), Isaac (*Gn* 24, 14) Jacob (*Ex* 32, 13 ; *Ez* 37, 25), Joshua (*Jos* 24, 29), David (2 *Sm* 7, 8) etc. Servants are also the prophets and priests, who are entrusted with the mission of training the people for the faithful service of the Lord. The Book of the Prophet Isaiah exalts the docility of the "Suffering Servant" a model of fidelity to God in the hope of ransom for the sins of the people (cf. *Is* 42-53). Some women also give examples of fidelity, like Queen Esther, who, before interceding for the salvation of the Hebrews, directs a prayer to God, calling herself several times "your servant" (*Est* 4:17).

2. Mary, the "full of grace", when she proclaims herself "slave of the Lord", wishes to commit herself to perfecting in a perfect way the service that God expects from all her people. The words "Behold the handmaid of the Lord" announce to Him who will say of Himself: "The Son of man has not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many" (*Mk* 10:45; cf. *Mt* 20, 28). Thus, the Holy Spirit realizes between the Mother and the Son a harmony of intimate dispositions, which will allow Mary to fully assume her maternal role with respect to Jesus, accompanying him in his mission as Servant.

In the life of Jesus, the will to serve is constant and surprising. Indeed, as Son of God, he could rightly have been served. Attributing the title of "Son of man",

about which the book of Daniel states: "All peoples, nations and languages will serve him" (*Dn* 7, 14), could have demanded dominion over others. On the contrary, by rejecting the mentality of his time manifested by the aspiration of the disciples to occupy the first places (cf *Mk* 9:34) and by the protest of Peter during the washing of the feet (cf. *Jn* 13, 6).), Jesus does not want to be served, but wants to serve up to the point of totally surrendering his life in the work of redemption.

3. Mary, even though she was aware of the very high dignity that had been granted her, at the announcement of the angel spontaneously declared herself "slave of the Lord". In this commitment to service she also includes her purpose of serving others, as evidenced by the relationship between the episode of the Annunciation and that of the Visitation: when the angel informs her that Elizabeth is waiting for the birth of a child, María he sets out and "in a hurry" (*Lk* 1:39) goes to Galilee to help his cousin in the preparations for the birth of the child, with full availability. Thus it offers Christians of all times a sublime model of service.

The words "Let it be to me according to your word" (*Lk* 1:38), manifest in Mary, who declares herself a slave of the Lord, a total obedience to the will of God. The optional "let it be done" (*genoito*), used by Saint Luke, not only expresses acceptance, but also a convinced acceptance of the divine project, a fact made with the commitment of all his personal resources.

4. Mary, fully accepting the divine will, anticipates and endorses the attitude of Christ who, according to the letter to the Hebrews, when entering the world, says: "Sacrifice and oblation you did not want, but you have formed a body for me (. ...) Then I said: Behold, I come (...) to do, O God, your will! " (*Hb* 10, 5-7, *Ps* 40, 7-9).

In addition, the docility of Mary announces and prefigures the one manifested by Jesus during his public life until Calvary. Christ will say: "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to carry out his work" (*Jn* 4, 34). In this same line, Mary makes the will of the Father the inspiring principle of her whole life, seeking in it the necessary strength for the fulfillment of the mission entrusted to her.

Although at the time of the Annunciation Mary still does not know the sacrifice that will characterize the mission of Christ, Simeon's prophecy will make her see the tragic destiny of her Son (cf *Lk* 2, 34-35). The Virgin will be associated with him with intimate participation. With her full obedience to the will of God, Mary is willing to live all that divine love has planned for her life, even the "sword" that will pierce her soul.

regards

Dear brothers and sisters:

I greet with all affection the Spanish-speaking pilgrims. Especially the "Folk Group of Guatemala" and the faithful of the Parish of Our Lady of Begoña, of Madrid. I hope that the sublime example of the Virgin Mary will help you to always welcome the loving will of the Father over each one. I impart to you and to your families the Apostolic Blessing.

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