



*“Indulge in reading holy books...  
they are like pasture to the soul and a great support on the way to perfection”*

8th MONTH: APRIL

## YOUR FACE I SEEK, OH LORD

### From the Gospel according to Matthew (13:44-52)

*"The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field; a man finds it and hides it; then he goes, full of joy, sells all his possessions and buys that field. The kingdom of heaven is also like a merchant who goes in search of precious pearls; having found a pearl of great value, he goes and sells all his possessions and buys it. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net cast into the sea, which gathers all kinds of fish. When it is full, the fishermen pull it ashore, sit down, collect the good fish in baskets and throw away the bad ones.*

*This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous<sup>50</sup> and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

*Have you understood all these things?". "Yes", they replied. And he said to them, "Therefore every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old."*

Separating the wicked from the righteous ones is a heresy that often tempts the believers of all religions: this happens when the desire for one's own salvation is confused with the expectation of possessing salvation and even of being able to spread it at their own will. This is when the worst divisions in history take place. Dictatorships, economic regimes, religious beliefs have often brought about divisions within society based on a desire for pure race, efficiency and economic productivity, internal security, but also

defence to the bitter end (sometimes with violence) of the orthodoxy of faith and religious freedom.

It is up to God to divide the good fish from the bad ones and He sends his angels to witness the final response of those who - in the name of their freedom - wish to say their final no to God's love.

We are entrusted with the mysterious gift of our faith. This is like a treasure hidden within the dynamic fabric of our lives; we are called to engage in the search for it and to invest our whole existence so that it may come to light. We are meant to sell everything else to buy the field or the precious pearl, and this implies putting our lives on the line. Who are we requested to do this for? And for what purpose? It is specifically for that Word that Jesus came to bring us, which speaks to us through our daily listening, our attentiveness to the resonance of the Word in others, the need to read the Gospel in our daily lives. This will lead us to have our ears ready and open, just like Mary, who was always ready and willing to listen to the Word. She knew it would show Her the face of God.

### From a letter by Padre Pio to Raffaolina Cerase

Pietrelcina, 28 July 1914, Epist. II, pp. 144-145

*Those who read St Augustin's book of his Confessions, can hardly hold back their tears. What an atrocious battle, what fierce disputes he sustained in his poor heart because of the great repugnances he felt in abandoning the pleasures of his senses. He said about himself, that he was forced to groan as he felt he was bound by his will almost as if by a*



## PADRE PIO OF PIETRELCINA PRAYER GROUPS

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*hard chain, and that the infernal enemy kept his will confined between the shackles of a cruel necessity. He wrote that he experienced an agony like that of death, in parting from his vulgar ways. He added that whenever he was near to appeasement, his ancient vanities and pleasures would pull him away again and again from the attained good purpose, and would constantly murmur to him: therefore dost thou forsake us? So from this moment onwards we will never be with you again?*

*However while the saint was struggling with such tumultuous affections, he heard a voice saying to him: take and read this. He immediately obeyed this voice, and started reading a chapter by St Paul.*

*All the hardness of his heart suddenly softened, and his spirit found a full serenity and placid quietness. From that moment, having broken with the world, the devil and the flesh, he devoted himself to the divine service and became that great saint who is honoured on the altars today.*

The person who meditated and lived the Word of God to the fullest is the Virgin Mary. We are now going to see how the recent pontiffs present her as a disciple of the Word.

Pope John Paul II left us an encyclical about the Rosary (Rosarium Virginis Mariae) where he mentions Padre Pio among the great saints who recited the Rosary daily. The pontiff states: "The contemplation of Christ has in Mary its incomparable model. The face of the Son belongs to her like to no one else". Being His Mother, the one who gave birth to Him, the Virgin had plenty, in fact endless opportunities to contemplate Him, right from the Annunciation and then throughout his life. Depending on the moments in the life of Jesus, the Pope describes some peculiarities of Mary's gaze: questioning gaze, in the episode of the bewilderment she would have a questioning look, while it would be a penetrating look at the wedding in Cana, intensely sorrowful under the cross, radiant at Easter, ardent at Pentecost.

At Mary's school, according to the indications of St John Paul II, we can learn how to contemplate the face of Jesus not only in the holy rosary, but whenever we listen to and meditate on His Word.

### **Mary's answers**

Our loving gaze on the face of Christ should not make us mere spectators of His mystery.

Let us then look at the threefold response of Mary, at the moment of the Annunciation, as Pope Benedict XVI explained it to us, in his book 'Jesus of Nazareth'.

First of all 'Mary reflects (enters into dialogue with herself) on what the greeting of the messenger of God. Thus a characteristic trait of the image of the Mother of Jesus already emerges here, a trait that we encounter in the Gospel in two similar situations: the inner confrontation with the Word (cf. Lk 2:19-51). She does not stop at the initial sensations of awe at the closeness of God in His angel, rather She seeks to understand'. According to the pontiff, this attitude shows how Mary was a courageous woman, capable of a strong, reliable interior strength whereby when faced with mystery she would not stop, but humbly and firmly give her full self to God's prompting. This is exactly what the attitude of the Church and of all believers should be: putting their whole selves at stake before God.

Mary thus appeared to be a courageous woman who, even in the face of the unprecedented, maintained her self-control. At the same time, she is presented as a woman of great interiority, who held her heart and reason together and sought to understand the context, to grasp the whole of God's message.

In this way, Mary can be seen as the image of the Church, that reflects on the Word of God, seeks to understand it in its totality and preserves this gift in its memory.

The second answer - again following the teaching of Pope Benedict - should be read in this sense: "How shall this happen, for I know no man?". Mary had no doubts, unlike Zechariah, she was already



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fully available, she approached the mystery, she did not want to understand it but simply sought to be enlightened on "how" to fulfil God's plan.

To the words of the angel who announced to her that she would be a mother through the Holy Spirit, Mary responded with her Yes: "Let it be done to me according to your word". Benedict XVI comments: "The Fathers of the Church have sometimes expressed this by saying that Mary would have conceived through the ear - that is: through her listening. Through her obedience, the Word entered her and in her it became fruitful'.

We have here a poignant resemblance to what our listening in the school of Mary must be like: we must generate Christ through listening to the Word. Our obedience to God generates from a heart that daily listens to what He wants to tell us.

### **The Woman of the Beatitudes**

When Pope Francis instituted the 'Word of God' Sunday, he presented Mary as She who is blessed because she has received the Word of the Lord. "Mary's beatitude precedes all the beatitudes pronounced by Jesus for the poor, the afflicted, the meek, the peacemakers and those who are persecuted, because this is the necessary condition for any other beatitude. No poor person is blessed because he or she is poor; they become so if, like Mary, they believe in the fulfilment of the Word of God. This is recalled by St Augustine, a great disciple and teacher of the Holy Scriptures:

Someone in the crowd, particularly caught up in the excitement, exclaimed: 'Blessed is the bosom that bore you'. And he replied: "Blessed are rather those who hear the Word of God, and keep it". As if to say: even my mother, whom you call blessed, is blessed precisely because she keeps the word of God, not because in her the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, but because She holds on the very Word of God through whom she was made, and who in her became flesh" (*On the Gospel of John, 10:3*).

Mary teaches us to be disciples of the Word, but also to guard it as a precious gift, as that hidden treasure that a man finds in a field, and so the parable tells us – goes to sell all of his possessions and buys that field or pearl. Mary keeps the Word in her heart, and invests everything she has in order to be rich only in God

### **Contemplating the mystery of God in us**

The purpose of the meditation on the Word is to lead us to contemplate the mystery of God. It all happens in that moment of silence, words give way to our gaze, just as when we contemplate a work of art or a panorama and we exclaim: "There are no words". Contemplation is a grace to which the Lord leads us only when there is truly silence in our hearts, when God's space takes over, when obedience becomes our surrender to the Father. The words of the Pontiff have presented us with Mary's contemplative spirit, this stepping back of our selves before the mystery of God that is unravelling.

We have already explained the concept of simplicity (from simplex, folded once); in simplicity we open our hearts before God and let His light illuminate us. The access to the virtuous life that we have tried to present this year is the means to speedily access the contemplation of God, because His light is not something abstract and emotional, but touches our inner life and elevates it far beyond our expectations.

Contemplation produces an unexpected longing for God in us. While it may seem that everything is splendour and beauty, our inner longing opens our hearts to the hope of possessing Him in fullness. This is when the prayer comes forth: Thy face I seek, O Lord, hide not Thy face from me (*Ps 27*)