

Homily

His Excellency Archbishop Faustino Sainz Muñoz

*To the Pilgrimage to Our Lady of Walsingham, March 2007
Ecumenical Marian Pilgrimage Trust*

Deuteronomy 4: 1, 5-9

Psalm 147

John 2: 1-11

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ:

I now confirm what I said at the beginning of Mass. I am very pleased to have this opportunity to celebrate Holy Mass with you and for you today. I thank the Reverend Peter Marr for so kindly inviting me to be with you all today on this Ecumenical Pilgrimage in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary here in Walsingham. As the representative of the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, one of the joys of my life is to have the chance to visit the different parts of England, Wales and Scotland and to spend time with different groups and persons in order to discover the realities, joys and sorrows, which are part of Christian life in this land, once known as "the Dowry of Mary." It is good that this particular Pilgrimage unites Christians from a number of differing traditions and backgrounds around Our Lady at this historic shrine.

During this holy season of Lent we prepare ourselves to relive the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Our Blessed Lord and we cannot forget that Mary's heart was pierced too, as she followed her Son on his last earthly journey and stood at the foot of the Cross. Quoting Saint John, the Holy Father has chosen to entitle his Lenten Message this year:

They shall look on Him whom they have pierced. (John 19: 37)

Mary particularly was aware of what that meant and the cost to Our Lord, who was obedient to the will of God out of love of us. The Holy Father writes:

Jesus said: 'When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men to myself' (John 12: 32) The response the Lord ardently desires from us is above all that we welcome His love and allow ourselves to be drawn to Him. Accepting His love, however, is not enough. We need to respond to such love and dedicate ourselves to communicating it to others. Christ 'draws me to Himself' in order to unite Himself to me, so that I learn to love the brothers with His own love.

This love is the road that leads us towards perfection and we are called by Our Blessed Lord, each and every one of us, Religious, lay faithful and clergy, Christians of each tradition and background, to strive towards that perfection.

In the Old Testament reading from the Book of Deuteronomy, which we have just listened to, we hear God spelling out that relationship of love established with his chosen people. The relationship which we too inherit.

His love is given and our response to that love has to be freely chosen, accepted and embraced. Not half-heartedly, but with generosity. As the Holy Father expressed it:

We need to belong completely to Christ so as to become a permanent confession of faith, an unequivocal proclamation of truth that frees us from the seduction of the false idols that deceive the world. To belong to Christ means to keep the flame of love always burning in our heart, continually fed by the richness of faith.

It is precisely this generosity that we see in the life and sufferings of Our Blessed Mother. In her "Fiat"! In her obedience to the call of God, revealed through the Message of Gabriel. A generosity reflecting the generosity of Our Lord Himself, which He revealed and continues to reveal to us each day.

As brothers and sisters of Christ and baptised members of the Church, we are not simply a collection of individuals with basically shared beliefs and a common way of looking at the world. No! Each one of us has encountered a person, Jesus Christ, "the one whom they have pierced", who challenges us and changes us, showing us how to love." The example of Our Blessed Lady is crucial for us here. Like her, we are called to perfection.

In his Lenten Message, the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI exhorts us to:

...live Lent then, as a 'Eucharistic' time in which, welcoming the love of Jesus, we learn to spread it around us with every word and deed. Contemplating 'Him whom they have pierced' will move us in this way to open our hearts to others, recognising the wounds inflicted upon the human person; it will move us, in particular, to fight every form of contempt for life and human exploitation and to alleviate the tragedies of loneliness and abandonment of so many people.

Our Lady is the perfect example of such active concern for others. At the Marriage Feast of Cana we see this love in action, but as always, pointing towards her Son and asking that those present look to Him too and do just as He commands.

Sometimes the search for perfection may leave us feeling inadequate. As witnesses in our secularised society our resources and those of our Church Communities seem so small and our strength seems puny. Though we are not yet in full Eucharistic communion of faith and belief, God has called us, chosen us and will help us to work together in our service of His Church, His people and the wider world. As the psalmist reminds us:

They are happy who do his will, seeking him with all their heart.

At the end of Mass I will cordially impart to you and to all your sisters and brothers, involved in whichever way in the Ecumenical Marian Pilgrimage Trust, the Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius the Apostolic Blessing of our Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI, praying that you may all be strengthened in love and generosity, following the example of Our Blessed Mother Mary. Like all good Mothers, she wants the sisters and brothers of Her Son to be close together and united, in so far as possible, as one family in faith, hope and

love. To conclude, may I ask that you please pray for the Holy Father and for me, as I will continue to pray for you in all your endeavours.

God bless you. God keep you.

PER MATREM AD FILIUM—*Through the Mother to the Son*
OMNIA AMORE MARIA DUCE—*Do everything by love, under Mary's leadership*

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