

Pope Benedict XVI. in Bavaria

**Monday, September 10, 2006,
Holy Mass at Altötting`s Kapellplatz**

Speech of the Holy Father

Note: Mistakes in the text are transmission errors and could not be corrected because of the nature of the file.

Dear Brothers and Sisters!

In today's First Reading, Responsorial Psalm and Gospel, three times and in three different ways, we see Mary, the Mother of the Lord, as a woman of prayer. In the *Book of Acts* we find her in the midst of the community of the Apostles gathered in the Upper Room, praying that the Lord, now ascended to the Father, will fulfil his promise: "Within a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit" (1:5). Mary leads the nascent Church in prayer; she is, as it were in person, the Church at prayer. And thus, along with the great community of the saints and at their centre, she stands even today before God interceding for us, asking her Son to send his Spirit once more upon the Church and to renew the face of the earth.

Our response to this reading is to sing with Mary the great hymn of praise which she raises after Elizabeth calls her blessed because of her faith. It is a prayer of thanksgiving, of joy in God, of blessing for his mighty works. The tenor of this hymn is clear from its very first words: "My soul magnifies - makes great - the Lord". Making the Lord great means giving him a place in the world, in our lives, and letting him enter into our time and our activity: ultimately this is the essence of true prayer. Where God is made great, men and women are not made small: there too men and women become great and the world is filled with light.

In the Gospel passage, Mary makes a request of her Son on behalf of some friends in need. At first sight, this could appear to be an entirely human conversation between a Mother and her Son and it is indeed a dialogue rich in humanity. Yet Mary does not speak to Jesus as if he were a mere man on whose ability and helpfulness she can count. She entrusts a human need to his power - to a power which is more than skill and human ability. In this dialogue with Jesus, we actually see her as a Mother who asks, one who intercedes. As we listen to this Gospel passage, it is worth going a little deeper, not only to understand Jesus and Mary better, but also to learn from Mary the right way to pray. Mary does not really ask something of Jesus: she simply says to him: "They have no wine" (*Jn* 2:3). Weddings in the Holy Land were celebrated for a whole week; the entire town took part, and consequently much wine was consumed. Now the wedding couple find themselves in trouble, and Mary simply says this to Jesus. She doesn't tell Jesus what to do. She doesn't ask for anything in particular, and she certainly doesn't ask him to perform a miracle to make wine. She simply hands the matter over to Jesus and leaves him to decide what to do. In the straightforward words of the Mother of Jesus, then, we can see two things: on the one hand her affectionate concern for people, that maternal affection which makes her aware of the problems of others. We see her heartfelt goodness and her willingness to help. This is the Mother that generations of people have come here to Altötting to visit. To her we entrust our cares, our needs and our troubles. Her maternal readiness to help, in which we trust, appears here for the first time in the Holy Scriptures. But in addition to this first aspect, with which we are all familiar, there is another, which we could easily overlook: Mary leaves everything to the Lord's judgement. At Nazareth she gave over her will, immersing it in the will of God: "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word" (*Lk* 1:38). And this continues to be her fundamental attitude. This is how she teaches us to pray: not by seeking to affirm our own will and our own desires before God, but by letting him decide what he wants to do. From Mary we learn graciousness and readiness to help, but we also learn humility and generosity in accepting God's will, in the confident conviction that whatever he says in response will be best for us.

If all this helps us to understand Mary's attitude and her words, we still find it hard to understand Jesus' answer. In the first place, we don't like the way he addresses her:

“Woman”. Why doesn’t he say: “Mother”? But this title really expresses Mary’s place in salvation history. It points to the future, to the hour of the crucifixion, when Jesus will say to her: “Woman, behold your son - Son, behold your mother” (cf. *Jn* 19:26-27). It anticipates the hour when he will make the woman, his Mother, the Mother of all his disciples. On the other hand, the title “Woman” recalls the account of the creation of Eve: Adam, surrounded by creation in all its magnificence, experiences loneliness as a human being. Then Eve is created, and in her Adam finds the companion whom he longed for; and he gives her the name “woman”. In the *Gospel of John*, then, Mary represents the new, the definitive woman, the companion of the Redeemer, our Mother: the name, which seemed so lacking in affection, actually expresses the grandeur of Mary’s mission.

Yet we like even less the other part of Jesus’ answer to Mary at Cana: “Woman, what have I to do with you? My hour has not yet come” (*Jn* 2:4). We want to object: you have a lot to do with her! It was Mary who gave you flesh and blood, who gave you your body, and not only your body: with the “yes” which rose from the depths of her heart she bore you in her womb and with a mother’s love she gave you life and introduced you to the community of the people of Israel. If this is our response to Jesus, then we are already well along the way towards understanding his answer. Because all this should remind us that in Holy Scripture we find a parallelism between Mary’s dialogue with the Archangel Gabriel, where she says: “Let it be with me according to your word” (*Lk* 1:38), and the passage of the *Letter to the Hebrews* which cites the words of *Psalms* 40 about the dialogue between Father and Son - the dialogue which results in the Incarnation. The Eternal Son says to the Father: “Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body you have prepared for me ... See, I have come to do your will, O God” (*Heb* 10:5-7; cf. *Ps* 40:6-8). The “yes” of the Son: “I have come to do your will”, and the “yes” of Mary: “Let it be with me according to your word” - this double “yes” - becomes a single “yes”, and thus the Word becomes flesh in Mary. In this double “yes” the obedience of the Son is embodied, and Mary gives him that body. “Woman, what have I to do with you?” Ultimately, what each has to do with the other is found in this double “yes” which resulted in the Incarnation. It is to this point of profound unity that the Lord is referring. Here, in this common “yes” to the will of the Father, an answer is found. We too need to progress towards this point; and there we will find the answer to our questions.

If we take this as our starting-point, we can also understand the second part of Jesus’ answer: “My hour has not yet come”. Jesus never acts completely alone, and never for the sake of pleasing others. The Father is always the starting-point of his actions, and this is what unites him to Mary, because she wished to make her request in this same unity of will with the Father. And so, surprisingly, after hearing Jesus’ answer, which apparently refuses her request, she can simply say to the servants: “Do whatever he tells you” (*Jn* 2:5). Jesus is not a wonder-worker, he does not play games with his power in what is, after all, a private affair. He gives a sign, in which he proclaims his hour, the hour of the wedding-feast, the hour of union between God and man. He does not merely “make” wine, but transforms the human wedding-feast into an image of the divine wedding-feast, to which the Father invites us through the Son and in which he gives us every good thing. The wedding-feast becomes an image of the Cross, where God showed his love to the end, giving himself in his Son in flesh and blood - in the Son who instituted the sacrament in which he gives himself to us for all time. Thus a human problem is solved in a way that is truly divine and the initial request is superabundantly granted. Jesus’ hour has not yet arrived, but in the sign of the water changed into wine, in the sign of the festive gift, he even now anticipates that hour.

Jesus’ definitive “hour” will be his return at the end of time. Yet he continually anticipates this hour in the Eucharist, in which, even now, he always comes to us. And he does this ever anew through the intercession of his Mother, through the intercession of the Church, which cries out to him in the Eucharistic prayers: “Come, Lord Jesus!”. In the Canon of the Mass, the Church constantly prays for this “hour” to be anticipated, asking that he may

come even now and be given to us. And so we want to let ourselves be guided by Mary, by the Mother of Graces of Altötting, by the Mother of all the faithful, towards the “hour” of Jesus. Let us ask him for the gift of a deeper knowledge and understanding of him. And may our reception of him not be reduced to the moment of communion alone. Jesus remains present in the sacred Host and he awaits us constantly. Here in Altötting, the adoration of the Lord in the Eucharist has found a new location in the old treasury. Mary and Jesus go together. Through Mary we want to continue our converse with the Lord and to learn how to receive him better. Holy Mother of God, pray for us, just as at Cana you prayed for the bride and the bridegroom! Guide us towards Jesus - ever anew! Amen!