

## PASTORAL LETTER OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF CAPE TOWN

### ON

### OUR BLESSED LADY (AUGUST 1988)

My dear people,

I want to reflect with you on that wonderful person we call Mary, the Mother of Jesus and our Mother as well. Pope John Paul II has asked us to take time this year to see who she really is and the place God our Father wants her to occupy in our lives. Many very beautiful things have been written about her. Allow me to draw on this deep understanding of the Church and to present you with a short series of thoughts on Our Blessed Lady that I hope will bring you to an even deeper devotion to her in your daily lives.

#### **The special call of Our Lady**

When we had lost our way to Him, God our Father in His great love worked out a plan to save us. He created one person in a special way, a Jewish girl called Mary. From the moment of her conception He kept her free from sin. When she was a young woman about to be married to St Joseph, the Lord's angel came to her and made known to her the very special plan God had for her: "...You are to conceive and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus...He will be called Son of the Most High...He will rule over the House of Jacob forever and His reign will have no end..." (Lk 1:31-33). When it was explained to her that by the power of the Holy Spirit she would give birth to Jesus the Son of God and the saviour of the human race, Our Lady accepted her calling in these gracious words: "...let what you have said be done to me." And she spent the rest of her life working with Jesus, helping Him bring us back to God.

The sheer beauty of the Father's love is shown in Our Lady's calling. She was married to St Joseph and lived as an ordinary housewife in the circumstances in which God placed her. She was a mother, the mother of Jesus, and later He gave her to us to be our mother and yet she was a virgin, without sin the first fruit of the redeeming work of Jesus. She was a co-worker with her Son in God's plan to bring us back to Him.

#### **How she lived her calling**

Very probably Our Lady would not have been recognised among the women of Nazareth. What made her special was her relationship to God. A woman in the crowd (and it's easy to imagine why) hearing Jesus speak "...raised her voice and said 'Happy the womb that bore you and the breasts that you sucked!'" But He replied "Still happier those who hear the word of God and keep it" (Lk 11:27-28). Our Lady was praised by Jesus because she heard God's word and lived by it. At the very moment when it was revealed to her what her vocation was she was clearly amazed but replied: "...let what you have said be done to me" (Lk 1:38). Throughout her life this was one of her most powerful qualities, her complete readiness to do what God wanted of her, to work with Him.

Another quality she consistently showed was her caring for others. The wedding feast at Cana could have been a great embarrassment to the newly married couple. Instead

it turned out to be “the first of the signs given by Jesus...He let His glory be seen and His disciples believed in Him...” (Jn 2:11). When her cousin Elizabeth was in need it was Mary who went and stayed with her. But nowhere did she show her caring more deeply than remaining with her Son Jesus during the terrible hours of his final suffering and death. St. John put it starkly: “Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother” (Jn 19:25).

### **Her influence in our lives**

As He was about to die, Jesus turned to St John and said: “This is your mother” (Jn 19:27). From the earliest days of the Church it was recognised that these words were addressed to all the brothers and sisters of Jesus, all those he had come to take back to the Father.

She is to mother us in the same way as she mothered Jesus. Over the centuries, millions have testified as to how beautifully she cares for those who approach her with confident trust.

She is present to each of us as unique individuals in all our very personal needs, interceding for us as she did for the newly married couple of Cana.

She is present to the poor because she herself was poor and found herself homeless when that moment came to bring forth the Saviour of the world. She had to “lay him in a manger because there was no room for them at the inn” (Lk 2:7).

She is present to the suffering in the appalling sufferings of her Son who is flesh of her flesh and blood of her blood. She suffers with those in need.

She is present to the family as a mother in the family of Jesus and St. Joseph because this was her own experience of daily life.

She is present to all of us in this country because South Africa dedicated to her under the title of her Assumption. She knows how dearly we need that peace and love that comes through true justice.

The Marian Year has been an opportunity for all of us to deepen our love for Our Blessed Lady. At the heart of that love is this fact: “This is your mother” (Jn 19:27). Blessed indeed are those who hear this word and keep it.

May Our Lady mother each one of us into the very heart of God.

Signed: + STEPHEN NAIDOO CSsR  
Archbishop of Cape Town