



Pax Christi

Dearest Brothers

The Solemnity of the Assumption of Mary into Heaven is approaching, an occasion for our religious family to magnify God for all His benefits and to renew personally and communally the covenant made with Him through the profession of vows. In this renewal we entrust ourselves to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, our Heavenly Patroness, so that we may be progressively transfigured by Christ on the path of the Evangelical Counsels.

In offering each of you my best wishes for full joy and renewed enthusiasm, I like to share some passages from the Word of God that I find useful and enlightening for our consecration.

The first text of the readings is taken from the book of Revelation (Rev 11:19; 12:1-6.10). A "great sign appears in the sky...a woman clothed with the sun", the image of God's people, a people of sinners, but at the same time the Bride of God who gives birth in pain to the messiah. Against the people and against the messiah rises the dragon, satan, the incarnation of evil, who in his overthrow of the stars of heaven robs God's people of useful points of reference to guide the believers' path towards the eternal goal.

The accuser disorients our path, towards union with God, striving to occupy the place that the Risen One has deserved and prepared for us. But Mary - and with her the Church - appears crowned with twelve stars, that is, Mary receives and offers as a gift to mankind points of light on which to direct the way to paradise. Indeed, Mary offers herself as a shining star, the Stella Maris: by following her, we find shelter in God, far from the clutches of the wicked, in the desert where God speaks over our hearts and makes us his Bride.

The woman of the Apocalypse is clothed with the sun and, as Psalm 45 sings, she shines at the King's right hand clothed in gold of Ophir, clothed in the finest gold that mankind has ever known. Mary shines forth as Queen at the right hand of the Lord, this symbolism stems from the consideration that the Church is the Beloved Bride of God, of which Mary, an eminent member and His image, the pinnacle of humanity, is the most perfect icon!

The same book of John, Rev 19:7-8, celebrating the defeat of the great Babylon, issues a rousing invitation to exultation:

"Let us rejoice and exult, let us give glory to him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come; his bride is ready: she was given a robe of pure linen and shining. The robe of linen are the righteous works of the saints".

Behold, that woman clothed in sunshine is the same woman clothed in pure linen and shining, that is, the woman enveloped in the divine light that is communicated to her by her Son, the Sun of righteousness. But it is striking that this robe of linen is the works of the righteous.

The purest robe of the Church, without wrinkle or stain, 'worn' by Mary as her icon, is made of the works of the righteous, that is to say, it is made of the righteous works of the baptised, the warp and weft of this robe are our good works, the thread is the grace of the Spirit given to us as a gift.

This Word then turns to us and challenges us personally:

- Looking carefully at myself in my daily life, what works do I perform that are a factual reflection of my contemplation of Mary, "Virgin made Church" - as St Francis of Assisi defines her - our mother and teacher?
- What cloth do I weave in my life offered as a saint to sanctify the Church, the Bride of Christ? What *habitus* do I clothe myself with? Are my habitual works in keeping with the robe I wear as a sign of my special consecration?
- Is my life entirely at the service of this Church for which Card. Baronius had to say that it would be preferable to dissolve the Congregation so as not to fail the Church in anything (Bonafede, Chronicles L. IV ch. 19)?

It would be nice to be able to verify that, even in the small things, each one of us feels like a servant willing, even in labour pains, to do good works, to thus weave part of the dress of the Church-Bride, avoiding at all costs to "undress" her by carrying out works that only respond to "one's own interest" (SGL Letter 16.09.1603). Let us not take refuge under a cloak that our works have eaten away like moth and rust!

It would be nice if we could be sure to live fully the memorial of our garments, made white in the washing of blood flowing from Christ's sacrifice.

We could begin to follow this course sparked by the passage, like a morning star, by paying attention to the words we daily say and reveal to ourselves, to discern whether they come from the Word of God and are inspired by it, or whether they are suggestions of another nature.

We may find widespread use of the possessive adjective to define my thought, my vocation, my idea, my will, my family. Here we could decide, strengthened by the invitation of the holy Founder, to find suitable remedies and lay at the feet of the Virgin Bride at least one of the "major imperfections" (SGL Letter 24.08.1601) asking for the grace and strength to face and overcome it.

Truly, I hope and wish you, to find a more virtuous use of the personal possessive, which indicates a movement of oblation and delivery to the other in the *sequela Christi*: my availability, my full obedience, my sacrifice, my donation, for the good of this family of mine, the Order, the Church for which I consider everything secondary, and thanks

to which I receive one hundred percent already today and eternal life together with Mary when the Lord comes.

I wish each of us renewed fidelity to the charity of Christ, in the Order and in the Church, with the grace of the Holy Spirit, under the patronage of Mary our heavenly Patroness and with the help of St John Leonardi our Father.

Yours most devoted in Christ.

Rome, August 6, 2023

Feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord

fr. Antonio Piccolo
Rector General OMD