

Pope: “Do not be afraid, Jesus defeated evil,” Mary tells people of our times

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In his tribute to the statue of the Immaculata in Piazza di Spagna, Benedict XVI outlines the city's problems: the evil told and amplified by the media, the indifference and lack of respect for people, the lack of responsibility that makes us spectators of evil. Mary's presence means Jesus has defeated evil and “makes us hope even in the humanly most difficult situations.” The Pope thanks all those who respond to evil doing good rather complaining or recriminating.



Rome (AsiaNews) – “Do not be afraid, Jesus defeated evil, uprooted it, freeing us from his rule.” For Benedict XVI, this is the message that the “sweet and reassuring presence” of Mary passes onto Christian cities, giving everyone “peace and hope during the happy and sad moments of life.” It is also how the Pontiff explained the sense of the act that each year since Pius XII, every Pope has performed when he brings flowers and prays before the column in Piazza di Spagna where a statue of the Immaculate Conception stands since Pius IX had it built in 1857.

The Pope arrived in the square around 4 pm. After some prayers and chants, he blessed a basket of roses offered to the Virgin and placed at the bottom of the column.

In his address, Benedict XVI outlined the many problems of the city: the evil told and amplified by the media to the point of poisoning us and leading us to despair; the “perverse mechanism” of being exposed to public ridicule mixed with indifference as well as lack of respect and acceptance; the ‘pollution of the spirit’, which makes every encounter with others a superficial experience. “People become bodies and these bodies lose their soul, become things, faceless objects that can be exchanged and consumed.”

“Mary Immaculate helps us rediscover and defend what is inside people,” he said. She helps us “look upon them with mercy, love and infinite tenderness, especially those who are lonely, scorned or exploited.”

Quoting Saint Paul several times, the Pontiff said, “where sin increased, grace overflowed all the more *Rom.*, 5:20). He thanked all those who in silence practice “the Evangelic law of love that drives the world forward.” Indeed, “There are so many even here in Rome, and they do not make the headlines,” the Pope said; “men and women of every age, who realise that it is not worth condemning, complaining and recriminating; that it is better to respond to evil doing good; to changes things; or better, to changes people, hence improve society.”

Here is Benedict XVI's full address:

Dear brothers and sisters!

In the heart of Christian cities, Mary constitutes a sweet and reassuring presence. In her self-effacing style, she gives everyone peace and hope during the happy and sad moments of life. In churches, chapels or the walls of buildings, a painting, mosaic or a statue stand as a remainder of the Mother's presence, constantly watching over her children. Here too in Piazza di Spagna, Mary stands high, on guard over Rome.

What does Mary tell the city? What does her presence remind us? It reminds us that “where sin increased, grace overflowed all the more (*Rom.*, 5:20), as the Apostle Paul wrote. She is the Immaculate Mother who tells people of our time: Do not be afraid, Jesus defeated evil, uprooted it, freeing us from his rule.

When do we need such good deeds? Every day, in the newspapers, television and radio, evil is told to us, said again, amplified, so that we get used to the most horrible things, and become desensitised. In a certain way, it poisons us, because the negative is never fully cleansed out of our system but accumulates day after day. The heart hardens and thoughts become gloomy. For this reason, the city needs Mary, whose presence speaks of God, reminds us of Grace's victory over sin and makes us hope even in the humanly most difficult situations.

Those who invisible live or rather survive in the city. They make it to the front page of newspapers or the top of TV newscast—they are exploited until the end, for as long as the news and the images are newsworthy. Few can resist such a perverse mechanism. The city first, hides then exposes them to public scrutiny, without pity or with false pity. Everyone would like to be accepted as a person and considered as something sacred, because each human story is a sacred story that deserves the utmost of respect.

Dear brothers and sisters, we are the city! Each one of us contributes with our lives to its moral climate for better or worse. The border between good and evil runs across everyone's heart and none of us should feel entitled to judge others. Instead, each one of us must feel duty-bound to improve ourselves. Mass media make us feel like "spectators" as if evil only touched others and that certain things could not happen to us. Instead, we are all "actors" for better or worse, and our behaviour influences others.

We often complain about air pollution, that in some parts of the city the air is unbreathable. That is true. Everyone must do his or her part to make the city a cleaner place. However, there is another kind of pollution, which the senses cannot easily perceive, but which is equally dangerous. It is the pollution of the spirit, which makes us smile less, makes us gloomier, less likely to greet one another or look into each other face . . .

The city has many faces, but sadly, collective factors lead us to forget what is behind them. All we see is the surface. People become bodies, and these bodies lose their soul, become faceless objects that can be exchanged and consumed.

Mary Immaculate helps us rediscover and defend what is inside people, because in her there is perfect transparency of soul and body. She is purity in person in the sense that the spirit, soul and body are fully coherent in her and with God's will. Our Lady teaches us to open up to God's action and to look at others as he does, starting with the heart, to look upon them with mercy, love, infinite tenderness, especially those who are lonely, scorned or exploited. "[W]here sins increased, grace overflows all the more."

I want to pay tribute publicly to all those who in silence, in deeds not in words, strive to practice the Evangelical law of love which drives the world forward. There are so many of them even here in Rome. They do not make the headlines. They are men and women of all ages, who realise that it is not worth condemning, complaining or recriminating; that it is better to respond to evil doing good; to change things; or better, to change people, hence improve society."

Dear Roman friends and all of you who live in this city! Whilst we are busy in everyday tasks, let us listen to Mary's voice. Let us hear her silent but pressing appeal. She tells each one of us that wherever sin increases, may grace overflow all the more, first in our hearts, and then in our lives! Thus, the city shall be more beautiful, more Christian and more humane.

Thank you, Holy Mother, for this message of hope. Thank you for your silent but eloquent presence in the heart of our city. Immaculate Virgin, Salus Populi Romani, pray for us!

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