

## DO WHATEVER HE TELLS YOU

A Homily addressed mainly to Pilgrimage Directors  
Rev 21: 1-5; Luke 1:26-38

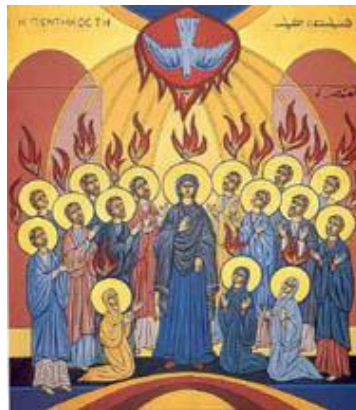
For many of us, these few days here in February have a tranquillity that we do not easily find during our summer pilgrimages. Then we feel the responsibility of looking after hundreds of pilgrims, caring for the invalids, anticipating the problems that might arise at any moment, from someone falling and breaking a leg to, as happened to some of us last year, an air traffic control strike on the day we were supposed to be travelling! The contrast between this occasion at the grotto and the summer is that today we can simply **be** here without having to think of all the things we need to **do**.

That thought struck me because in his letter for the end of the Jubilee, the Pope stresses that we should be more focussed on who we are than on what we need to do. 'To be', he says, comes before and is more important than 'to do' (JOHN PAUL II, *Tertio Millennio Ineunte*, 15) Perhaps as a Church we are too busy. We get so caught up in meetings and initiatives and crises and plans!

Although the Second Vatican Council gave us a rich and challenging vision of the Church as a mystery, as the sacrament of God's love and activity in the world, as the Bride of Christ, the years since have been more full than ever of a focus on the Church's structures rather than on her meaning, purpose, soul and spirit. We have never heard so much about 'the institutional Church'!

*First of all*, the Pope tells us, we need to reflect on who we are – a people called by God's word, invited to contemplate God's perfect revelation of himself in the face of Christ.

The reason why this thought struck me in the context of this Mass at the Grotto is that we are perhaps beginning to see that this is precisely what Mary is saying to the Church today. There are two dimensions of the Church, the Pope tells us, the dimension of Peter – the structures the doctrines, the visible activities – and the dimension of Mary – holiness, listening to God's word, contemplating the truth of the Gospel, bringing Christ to the world.



Both dimensions are essential; both are at work in every aspect of the life of the Church. The Holy Father is, however, in no doubt that the only purpose for which the institutions and structures and visible activity exist is to draw people into holiness, that is into the closeness to Christ which has its model, its peak and its continuing presence in Mary, Mother of the Church, who was united in prayer with the Apostles when the Holy Spirit filled the infant Church with life and power (C.f. JOHN PAUL II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 27).

There is no better place to remind ourselves of that fundamental reason for everything we do than here at her grotto. Only in silence, tranquillity and adoration do we really come in

touch with who we are. Without that sense of who we are, we lose sight of the reason for all the rest – the activities, the organisations, even the pilgrimages!

Mary listened to God's word, received it, kept it and pondered it in her heart (Lk 2:51). She accepted what God's word promised: "Let it be with me according to your word". The only instruction she is ever recorded as giving is when she told to servants at Cana to follow the word spoken by her Son: "Do whatever he tells you" (Jn 2:5). (C.f. JOHN PAUL II, Homily at Knock, 30 September 1979).



She is the first disciple, "the first of 'those who hear the word of God and do it'" (JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptoris Mater*, 20).

Without faithful listening, all we do will be empty. It will also be fruitless, because listening to the word of God is not a passive thing. This is the Word through whom all things were made (Jn 1:3), the word that does not return empty (Is 55:11).

Mary's acceptance of the Word at the Annunciation was the condition for bringing about a fruitfulness such as the creation has never seen and could never have imagined – the birth of the eternal Word into our world and into our human family.

Acceptance of that word with her – the Marian dimension which is the core and purpose of all the Church's life – is our sharing in the triumphant plan of God who speaks from the throne saying, 'Behold I make all things new' (Rev 21:5).

May everything be done in us according to God's word.

9 February 2001