*The Three Covenants*

**Father Marie-Dominique Phillipe, O.P.**

We are spending these days in Rome in a family spirit, that is to say in very great simplicity and a great affection for one another. We know one another although we have not all met; we know one another in the presence of the Virgin Mary and Saint John, and these few days will allow us, I hope, to know one another better and to understand with greater depth what the "family of Saint John" represents, this little family that is growing bigger, close to our Lord, close to Mary, and close to Saint John, and here close to Peter, the successor of Peter, our Holy Father whom we love very much and who also loves us, I dare say.

On this subject, allow me to recall something which inspired me very much. You know that the Holy Father has shown us great kindness in allowing the novitiate to come to Rome each year to attend his private Mass on Holy Tuesday, and afterwards, to have a private little audience, where each person is presented to him and receives his blessing. One year I told the brothers, "Do not hesitate to present yourselves to the Holy Father, to say which diocese you are from, from America, France, or Navarre; do not hesitate to say where you are from; do not remain completely frozen in front of the Holy Father."

Indeed, when one is in front of the Pope, one can only look at him! When we are in front of Jesus, we will look at Him; we will not say anything at all, unless it is to say that we love Him. When we are in front of the Father, the Heavenly Father, here again, we will understand what silence is! When love is very great we do not desire to speak; we only have one desire, to be present, very close, and to live this presence with the greatest possible intensity. And when we come to Rome on Holy Tuesday, it is to show the Holy Father that we love him.

So that particular year, when the Holy Father passed in front of him, one of the novices said aloud, "Holy Father, we love you very much"! The Holy Father was a little bit surprised--I was next to him, I clearly saw the movement--then after a few seconds he said, "Perhaps it is reciprocal." That showed very clearly what was in his heart.... Since the beginning, he was particularly interested in the Community of Saint John. To the extent that, during the first years we went to Rome, there were young Italians who said, laughing, "Look at the Pope's 'pets'"!

These days we sense how much the Pope is often misunderstood and unloved, unfortunately even in the Church--and this is what burdens his heart as a father--we must be for him, as it were, the smile of Mary, by giving him a very simple witness of our love and showing him that we want to be faithful until the end. He has worn

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himself out for us. He has lost his health for us. We know this quite well: he has been the martyr Pope since he was shot on May 13, 1981. He has progressively worn himself out, and feels how heavy it weighs to be the father of all Christians and even of all men--and all the more since he is in the presence of those who no longer love him very much, or even do not love him at all. This is why we must ask for the grace to better understand what the covenant with Peter represents.

In his Gospel, Saint John (now all of us here are sons of Saint John, thus we will constantly return to these great secrets, to these revelations which he communicates to us with such generosity) shows us three great covenants: the covenant with the Eucharist, which is the testament of Christ, the covenant with Mary, and the covenant with Peter. The covenant in the Eucharist is for everyone: it occurs even in the presence of Judas. It is for everyone that Jesus gives Himself as bread under the appearances of bread and wine. It is for the entire Church, and it is for all men.

**The Covenant with Mary**

Then there is the covenant with Mary at the foot of the Cross. There John is alone. The beloved disciple is the only faithful disciple at the foot of the Cross. And Jesus does not stop at giving His Body as food and His Blood as drink. He wants to give us His Mother in very great poverty. When we love our mother tenderly, we keep her for ourselves and it is difficult to give her to another. Jesus, to show us all the love He has for John, gives him His own Mother at the moment when He is so profoundly and intimately united to her, in a unity that they had never experiences. We know quite well that when a son is suffering and very close to death and when he dies before his mother, there are at that moment extremely profound, unique bonds between mother and son.

At the foot of the Cross Mary knew that the Holy Spirit who was leading her, that the Father who was attracting her, wanted her to be there and that she was more useful than ever to Jesus; even more so than in the mystery of the Annunciation, if I might venture to say, because at the Annunciation it is a bond of love in pure joy. At Golgotha Mary glimpses the weight of the mystery of the Cross and all the sufferings of the Agony, and she is there to give witness to Jesus of her love and to carry with Him this great holocaust of the Cross. She is "one" with the heart of Christ, as He Himself is one with the Father. Jesus is one with the Father and manifests at the Cross, in a very particular way, this presence of the Father through Him. Jesus' words to the apostle Philip, "Philip, whoever sees me sees the Father" (Jn. 14:9) take on their full significance at the Cross. At the Cross, Jesus can say in all truth, "Whoever sees me sees the Father." And the look of Jesus Crucified upon Mary is the look of the Father upon her, upon His beloved little child--since the most marvelous fruit of the Cross is the mystery of the Immaculate Conception, the mystery of the holiness of Mary and thus of her strong union with the heart of Jesus.

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Now it is the moment when she lives this strong unity with Jesus that Jesus gives her to John and, by means of John, to the Church, to each of us.

We should always live by these words of Jesus to John, "Behold your mother" (Jn. 19:27), because these words are efficacious. If we have not yet discovered Mary, we must discover her during these days of pilgrimage. And in order to discover her we must listen to these words of Jesus in faith as words addressed to us in a realism even greater than if we were to hear Jesus saying words meant especially for us, because these words--"Behold your mother"--are revealed to John and, by means of him, are for us. We know this with certitude, with all the certitude of faith, "Behold your mother." "And from that hour on the disciple took her into his own" (Jn. 19:27), into his intimacy, in the depths of his heart.

**The Covenant with Peter**

The third covenant that John reveals to us in His Gospel is the covenant with Peter after the Resurrection. It would be very interesting to look closely at the special circumstances of these three covenants, the circumstances particular to the new Passover following the old, after the washing of the feet and with the presence of Judas. Jesus washed the feet of the disciples in order to be face-to-face with Judas and to allow him to understand how much his attitude wounded His heart....

At the foot of the Cross John is there close to Mary. Until then John had never dared consider Mary as his mother; that would have been impossible for him. Mary was the mother of his Lord, of his God, and one cannot have the same mother as the Beloved Son who became Incarnate out of love for us. Only Jesus can allow there to be between our heart and the heart of Mary a bond similar to that existing between His own heart and the heart of His Mother, only this can enable us to live in unison with her heart and have the same mother tongue as His, that of Mary. It is so great!

The third covenant is the one that the Holy Spirit asks us to especially live during these day: He is actually asking us to renew our covenant with Peter and to receive it directly from Christ. The two preceding ones are present, obviously. The Eucharist gathers us together; Mary accompanies us; and she is here, she who loves our Holy Father so much. Besides, it is something very impressive to see the last three great revelations the Church gives us by means of the last three dogmatic proclamations: the Immaculate Conception, the infallibility of the Pope, and the Assumption. It is Mary who surrounds Peter.

The Unity of the Last Three Dogmas Mary was given to John, and John represents in the Church the contemplative life under all its forms. It is not a form of life but it is the proper finality of the Christian life that John represents: the contemplative life. There are sometimes mothers and fathers with families who have a more intense contemplative life than some lukewarm monks, monks who have grown tepid. The

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advantage of the Community of Saint John is that the brothers and the sisters cannot be lukewarm; they are still too young! But we must always pray that they not be lukewarm, that as they grow old, they may be younger and younger for God, in an eternal youth of love. Besides, Saint Thomas says this is the grace of Saint John (Commentary on the Gospel of Saint John, chapter 21, 2639).

Mary teaches us to love Peter. The Immaculate Conception and the Assumption, the beginning and the end of Mary's life, surround Peter, surround the covenant of Peter with Jesus, this extraordinary covenant: "I have prayed for you so that your faith may not fail" (Lk. 22:32). Peter is the guardian of the Christian faith in all its fullness and all its integrity. In a world like ours where everything is relativized, where everything is challenged, the Christian, the Catholic, must understand that what comes directly from Christ, from the Father, from the Holy Spirit, is not questioned but must always deepen, root itself more deeply in our heart and in our intelligence. Jesus willed (this is very important for us) that there be in the world a witness of the certitude of faith so that what is revealed, what comes directly from the Holy Spirit, does not budge. It is a light of eternity in the relativity of our world; it is something that goes beyond everything and which enlightens us if we want it to, if we accept it.

Mary surrounds Peter with her Immaculate Conception and with her Assumption. Thus as soon as we go towards Peter, Mary is there to accompany us. Mary accompanies us in the step we take together, and I thank you for I know that for some this voyage represents a certain penance, at least in the financial order. And you have all been so generous that you have enabled numerous brothers and sisters, many of the poor of the heart of Mary, to come. For this I thank you. The sisters cannot thank you personally, nor can the brothers; yet know that in prayer this creates very strong bonds among us, because we know that Jesus receives with much love the alms of the widow (Lk. 21:1-4; Mk. 12:41-44), the alms which are precious....

Mary is there to bless these few days, to help us discover the bond that unites Jesus and our Pope, who is Peter for us. John Paul II is for us the one to whom Jesus said, "Feed my lambs" (Jn. 21:15-17). And the more we are lambs of Christ, the more we understand that Peter is there to lead us like the good shepherd with all his loving gratuitousness and in the total gift of himself; he gives his life for his sheep and he knows them, intimately and profoundly (Jn. 10:11,15).

**Seeking the Truth**

The Eucharist also leads us to Peter, since the Eucharist is the testament of love of the heart of Christ. This testament can only be perfectly lived if we have in our hearts a desire to seek the truth and an ardent thirst to go to the end in this search. It is so important, in today's world, to understand that Jesus asks for this search for the truth. And for this we must have a guardian, as the directions are so diverse. The world today

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enjoys a very great freedom, and often men abuse it and believe that they can communicate error as well as truth. Do people not speak of the "right to err"? I remember a professor at the University of Fribourg who wondered whether he shouldn't suggest that a student write a thesis on the right to err. So I asked myself, "What right does one have to err"? Does one have the right to poison oneself? Does one have the right to do stupid things, to mutilate oneself, to kill oneself"? In speaking of the "right to err" we see what this professor meant: let us respect those who seek and have not discovered the truth. Yes, this is surely so. But it is the man whom we respect, and we respect him in his freedom, not in his error. Error does not ask to be respected; it does not need to be. But we respect the man who seeks the truth, and Jesus asks us to receive the Holy Spirit who gives us "the entire truth" (Jn. 16:13).

It is for this reason that we must, during these few days, beg the Holy Spirit to give us a true look upon our Pope, upon Peter, so that we may correct in ourselves all that is not yet corrected. It is by love and in love that one can seek the truth with strength, with the utmost efficiency. If there is no love, this will not happen. I will always remember this student in philosophy, very brilliant, who stopped after having finished his bachelor's and master's degrees. I said to him, "You haven't the right to do this; you must finish your doctorate, and perhaps even apply for a teaching position." He answered me, "No, I'm tired of it," and he went to work at a bookstore to earn his living. That was a bit sad. Not that being a bookseller is sad! But it was a pity for him to stop this search at his age. And then one day I learned that he was engaged. I then said to myself, "Good; he is going to love someone more than his books"! And I said to his fiancee, "Shake your fiance up a little bit: he still needs to study his philosophy and finish his doctorate." Shortly thereafter, I met him and he said to me, "I am resuming work on my doctorate." I did not insist; I understood everything! Only love can push us to go to the end in the search for truth. Otherwise one tires very quickly, as soon as there are obstacles.

**John Paul II, Witness of Christ**

This is one of the admirable traits of our Pope. The first time that I saw him (he was not yet Pope, but already a cardinal) I had the impression of being face to face with an apostle like Peter, like John (depending on the moment), like James: in short, a true witness of Christ. This was in 1974, during a Thomistic congress which began at Rome and ended in Naples. Paul VI presided at the beginning of the congress and it ended with Cardinal Wojtyla in Naples. There I had the great joy of being in the same hotel as he, and since we were the only two clerics we ate breakfast together every morning. The rest of the time he was very busy, but this breakfast would last for some time because (since he had taught philosophy) we launched into philosophical discussions. I was so happy to meet someone so profoundly given! Four years later he was elected Pope. In the meantime, he had passed through Fribourg and I had dinner with him, during which we continued to speak about what we had done at Naples: about philosophy,

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about theology, about the Church.... And during this conversation he told me, "When I gather all my clergy together (he was then archbishop of Cracow) I speak with complete freedom as though I were in a country where one can speak in complete freedom. I know that that evening everything I said will be known by the KGB. I am not afraid, because I know that they fear me more than I fear them." I saw his interior strength when he said, "What do we have to fear? Nothing! They would not dare put me in prison; the entire diocese would rise up against that."

We really have before us a Peter enveloped by the prayer of Christ, "I have prayed for you that your faith not fail." There is a special prayer of Jesus for him as Pope, and as Pope seriously wounded once, and again seriously wounded, as it were, by the criticism of many, including many inside the Church. These are more serious wounds to bear than physical wounds.

Thus we are gathered at Rome to better understand these three covenants which are, as it were, illuminated by the Most Blessed Trinity. The Eucharist is Jesus; Mary is the Holy Spirit; and Peter is the paternal authority of the Father and the paternal authority of Jesus. By being close to our Pope, we approach the Heavenly Father in order to better discover Him, in order to better discover all His paternal authority of mercy and of love. And this is a very great grace for us to be gathered as a family, relying on one another. We draw a new strength in this because in this mutual love we will more profoundly discover how much God is love and how much He is here with us and loves us. This is something very great, especially in this year of the family and when we know how much the family is being demolished these days. Because of this we must have an even greater family spirit.

**We Are Called to Holiness**

The Church is a holy family in the extension of the Holy Family. And in the Church, the "family of Saint John" must aspire to holiness. This is also what I would like to recall to you. If we come here together despite all the difficulties, if we burn for God these few days which might have cost us a great deal and which in any case are burnt for God, it is to show our love for Him and, through the Pope, to show our love for the Father. Yet it is also--and Providence has so willed it--to prepare us for the feast of All Saints. Our vocation as children of God, as beloved children of Jesus and of the Virgin Mary, is a vocation to holiness. It is indeed rare that we can have a little family retreat. That is why I do not ask for complete silence (this would be impossible and you would say, "No, this is not what we need"), but that you keep times of silence in order to pray and to prepare yourself for the feast of All Saints.

The Feast of All Saints is the feast of all those whom we have loved. We all have, depending upon our age, a grandfather or father or brothers or sisters who are already in heaven, who are our saints. We must have our saints. And it is necessary that our

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saints be primarily our parents who are with Jesus and who watch over us, or friends, or uncles and aunts or grandparents for the younger ones. We must think of them in a very special way in order to tell them how much we love them. We love them more than ever for they are our older brothers.

We must also understand that we ourselves are called to holiness. Otherwise we would not be here. If we are here it is because we know that Jesus loves us; it is He who has loved us first (1 Jn. 4:19). And we know that our Christian vocation is to love. Saint Theresa of the Little Flower reminds us of this, "My vocation is love," and if we want to live by the three covenants of which I have spoken, it is in view of sanctity, it is for sanctity.

**Holiness is Joyful**

Understand clearly that holiness is joyful. The old adage remains forever true: a sad saint is a sorry saint. This is very true. Holiness puts joy in the heart... that is what I wish for you! I would like a great joy to be here. There will not be any evening fireworks, but there must be a great joy, and every day that joy must grow, increase, because we are happy to be together and happy to know that God loves us, that Jesus loves us. Know that we are all here to carry all your worries, all your sufferings: they are also our sufferings, our worries. Thus during these few days do not hesitate to let our contemplative and apostolic sisters carry them-because women always carry worries better than men, even when they are monks! And when they see the sisters joyful and victorious over evil, the brothers follow suit! It is like this in a family. I used to see that with my sisters, while my brothers and I were always dragging our feet a little--men are like that, they are prudent; this is a big excuse!--while we accept the fact that a woman loves madly. And when she is engaged, we are happy. Now sisters are engaged during their entire earthly life, and it is as wonderful as the first day of the engagement. You need only look at them: they are joyful, and they rejoice to give you joy because it is Mary who does this. Think of the smile of Mary to little Theresa of the Child Jesus. The smile of Mary is something very great. It was so at the beginning and end of her holiness. Our contemplative sisters were hesitant to come; they asked their legitimate authority, Cardinal Decourtray, and Cardinal Decourtray, who loved them very much, simply answered, "You will see what is better to do by asking the Virgin Mary." And the Virgin Mary led a small number of them here. As for our apostolic sisters--who are one with the contemplative sisters (they are one with Saint John and the Virgin Mary, and as apostolic sisters they must thirst for contemplation)--they are also here to help you. And the brothers are also here to help you, to carry you. Truly believe that during the Masses for these days you will be the first, with the Holy Father, to be offered to Jesus, to be carried out of love for Him; and we will pray that the love of Jesus be upon you.

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These few days must remind us that Christian holiness is not in the first place asceticism, severity. It is primarily love, a love bound to the Cross of Christ--Saint Theresa of Lisieux told us this so emphatically!--and a love bound to the search for the truth so that we may be witnesses of the truth. And a love which overflows in fraternal charity. Providence has permitted all of us to be gathered in the same hotel so that we might be closer to one another and that we might mutually carry one another in prayer. Christian holiness is to love Jesus, to love the Father madly, without reserve. Do not forget the words of Saint Bernard which we must keep very deeply in our hearts, "The measure of love is love." These are marvelous words that Saint Thomas Aquinas carefully preserved because they are so true! The measure of love is love. That is, love must always grow. It is the fire that builds, which is always rising, incessantly. To love God, to love the Father, to love Jesus, to love the beloved Son, the Lamb of God whose heart is wounded by love. To love Mary, to love Saint John, to love our brothers. And Saint John unites us all....

Holiness is a divine love which takes possession of us and which burns us, and which always lifts us higher so that we might be totally given, so that there might be nothing in us which resists love, so that we might truly be beloved sons of the Father.

Thus the Holy Spirit will ask of us, during these few days, a very great charity, a very noble charity, a love which immediately pardons clashes, which goes beyond difficulties, and which leads us to go very far in the gift of our entire selves to Jesus and the Father.

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