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The Woman Clothed with the Sun (Revelation 12:1-6) The Faces of Mary in Sacred Scripture

Revelation (the *Apocalypse*) is a book about struggle, streaked with the blood of history, but also a product of contemplation wrapped in a halo of light, from which emerges the happy ending of the story, when every tear shall be dried and death conquered forever. (21:14) This text belongs to the "apocalyptic" genre, rich in mysterious, grandiose, and frightening signs and symbols. Nonetheless, the author of the text defines it as a "prophecy" (1:3; 22:7 and 19), which, in Biblical language is, above all, an interpretation of present signs and the call to fidelity in the present moment. The intention of the author of the text is, therefore, that of helping us live with hope and to be optimistic while not ignoring suffering, in the certainty that the Evil One has no power over us and that the universe is in the hands of God the Father who takes care of His creatures without ever tiring.

In Chapter 12, certainly one of the most well-known pages of Revelation, appears a mysterious figure - the Woman clothed in white, about to give birth before the Dragon who is waiting to devour the Baby. The tradition of the Church has alternately seen in this woman the concrete person of Mary and the personification of the People of God (Israel and His Church). The birth of the Messiah, in fact, happened and is continually made present in every believer, just as it was in Mary, by means of the Incarnation of the Word and the action of the Holy Spirit. This mysterious woman, therefore, is, before all else, the woman *par excellence*, the Mother, the Spouse, and the Queen. In her, we contemplate, as in Judith, Esther, and the spouse in the Cantic of Canticles both the beauty of Mary and the greatness of her whom every woman is called to be, in the measure in which she becomes God's collaborator for the salvation of the world. Each one of us is called to be this woman in the Church today.

In the Messianic Birth described on this page, we do not find ourselves in front of the Birth at Bethlehem but, rather, at the one on Easter morning. The pains of childbirth correspond to those of Calvary where all Creation was renewed in the "birth" on the Cross, in which both Jesus and Mary were involved, each in the way proper to Him or to Her. The Son of the Woman, indeed is not only the Christ. In that Baby are represented all those who, reborn in Baptism, became sons and daughters of God, of the Church, and of Mary. The flight of the Woman into the desert is one type of this new Exodus. The desert, in fact, is a place of intimacy and divine protection. After the Pasch of the Lord, the time of the Church and the time of persecutions began, in which, however, the bread of life - of the Word and of the Eucharist - will never be lacking.

Praying with the Word (II Sam 6:1-2 and 9-15)

1. I become aware of God's presence. I imagine that I am in the scene before the Woman and the Dragon and I ask the Father for the grace to mirror myself in her.
2. I invoke the help of the Holy Spirit by slowly repeating this (or another) prayer:
"Holy Spirit, life of my life, come to inundate me with your light divine! Teach me to recognize in my daily life the signs of the times: make your Word become flesh in me, just as in Mary! Make me a collaborator in the Church, generating sons and daughters for God. Amen."
3. I read Revelation 12:1-6 slowly and reflect a while on these three points:

- **The sun and the moon** (v. 1): The light of the sun is God's truth, while the moon represents the ambiguity of the creature, always tempted by egoism and closing in on himself. I place myself under God's gaze, which illumines the truth of my being and helps me stamp out the ambiguity within me.
- **The pains of childbirth and the Dragon** (vss. 2-4): The woman screams in pain but does not complain for she knows she is to give birth to a son of God! For this reason, the Dragon is angry! At this moment in my life, what can I offer to the Father, so that he might unite it to Jesus' sacrifice, in the logic of the *da mihi animas; caetera tolle*?
- **The baby and the desert** (vss. 5-6) The Baby and the Woman are carried promptly to safety. I contemplate God's care in my life story and His interventions of salvation, so I may grow in the certitude that He will do anything – whatever He must – lest anyone be lost!
- 4. I finish this prayer with a heart-to-heart conversation with Mary: I entrust to her what provokes anxiety or fear in my work and I ask for the grace to be able to share in her courage and her maternal fecundity.
- 5. Our Father

After having concluded this prayer, I sit still and reflect a little: What has the Holy Spirit said to me through this prayer? Has He encouraged me? Has He invited me to conversion? How do I think I may correspond to the gift received in this prayer?