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## **“HUMBLE AND HIGHEST CREATURE” Walking with Mary, Mistress of Integral ecology**

### **8. Mary, Queen of Peace**

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The word 'peace' appears in 324 verses of Scripture. Longed for, invoked, promised, wished for, the peace of which Scripture speaks, *shalom* in Hebrew, is much more than the absence of conflict: it is fullness of life and communion with God, with one's neighbour and with the whole of creation. This is why believers - in the apostolic letters - greet each other by wishing for peace, which according to the Gospels is also the first gift of the Risen One, who on the first day after the Sabbath appears alive to his frightened friends and encourages them to go out and share this same gift with the world (Lk 24:36). To be peacemakers, according to Jesus, is a distinctive trait of those reborn from baptism, those who demonstrate by their deeds their identity as sons and daughters of God (Mt 5:9).

If peace is the fullness of life, war, conflict is the burden of death. Conflict destroys not only the friendship between individuals, families and peoples, it also destroys the beauty and harmony between human beings and other creatures. A bombed city, a bombed village, is not only robbed of the human lives that fall under the violence of the fire: the earth, the air, the water are also wounded, polluted, animals move away or die, in a multiplication of destruction and pain. There are more than fifty armed conflicts in the world at the moment. To these must be added the situations of precariousness and political and social tension experienced in so many contexts around the world where human beings and other living things are prevented from fully and peacefully developing their possibilities.

The commitment to integral ecology cannot fail to take into account the tragedy of the continuous expansion of conflicts, of the legal and illegal arms market, of the conditions of abuse, oppression, misery and exploitation in which human beings currently find themselves in so many parts of our world. Peace, as fullness of life and harmony, is the highest aspiration to which the process of ecological conversion can and must aspire. And peace as the mature management of conflicts, in the rejection of violence and in the search for mediation, conciliation, reparation, is a fundamental condition for just relations between human beings and with nature to flourish in our cities, as well as in our provinces and rural areas. That peace be made to prevail over conflict, on the other hand, is one of the four criteria for discernment in view of action that Pope Francis gave to all men and women of good will, in the encyclical *Evangelii Gaudium*.

In this difficult but necessary journey, Mary, Queen of Peace, can help us with her powerful intercession, but not only that. With the example of her life, she can also be a model and guide for us in our daily choices. One begins to build peace, in fact, in everyday relationships, by educating children and young people to live in peace with their peers, neighbours and family members.



The invocation to Mary as Queen of Peace was added to the Loreto Litany by Benedict XV in 1917, at the height of World War I. Mary, Queen of Peace, is invoked first and foremost because of her relationship with her Son, the Prince of Peace. Theotecnus of Livia, in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, stated that Scripture “also called the Mother of God, ‘peace’, when she said: ‘Justice and peace shall meet. Truth shall sprout from the earth’ (Ps 84:11). Peace is Mary. Justice is Christ, and faithfulness is Christ. Truth is Jesus and the earth is Mary.” Christian authors, especially in the Middle Ages, recognised in the Beloved of the Song of Songs certain characteristics of Mary. The Beloved, for example, is called *Sulamite* (Song 7.1), that is, she who brings peace by her presence and love. Similarly, Mary, beloved of the Father, docile to the Spirit and very close to her Son Jesus, was indeed a peacemaker in her daily life in Nazareth and Jerusalem, during the time of her earthly pilgrimage, and continues to intercede for us today the gift of peace from Heaven.

Very often we imagine the daily life of Mary, Joseph and Jesus as a small paradise on earth, where everyone lives in harmony and without conflict. It is very likely, in reality, that daily life in Nazareth was rather complex from a relational point of view and demanded from Mary a continuous effort to weave and re-weave relationships, overcoming misunderstandings, prejudice and rigidity. According to the customs of the time, the young bride went to live with her husband's family, where she shared daily life with her brothers-in-law, sisters-in-law and many nieces and nephews. We can imagine the hubbub, quarrels, petty envy and jealousy that could not be missed in the daily life of an extended family. The gospels, moreover, between the lines, tell us of the struggle of the inhabitants of Nazareth to accept the person and message of Jesus. It was a small village, of about 300 inhabitants, where everyone knew each other inside out. This situation must not have been at all easy for Mary. Her apprenticeship as a peacemaker certainly began here.

The book of the Acts of the Apostles also gives us a glimpse of the first community, within which Mary is present and her presence is particularly significant. We know this because she is the only woman in the group to be called by name, like the twelve apostles (Acts 1:14). The author indicates 'concord' as a characteristic trait of this first community and we are so used to hearing it, that we do not realise how this concord must have been the fruit of a patient work of mediation and reconciliation. Before Easter, in fact, Jesus had prophesied the dispersion of the disciples (Mt 26:31) and, in fact, following his arrest, some flee, others deny. Some, on the other hand, together with the women and Mary, found the courage to remain until the end. The first community, therefore, was in fact divided into two. And Mary's presence could have constituted for those who had betrayed a kind of continuous rebuke. If this was not the case, we owe it also to Mary's ability to forgive the betrayers of her Son and to welcome them back, all of them, as her children.

In a wounded world, like ours, peace can only flourish where mercy is sown with abundance. Mary knows the art and the price of forgiveness and of a broad welcome, capable of including everyone. She lived neither in a family nor in an ideal community. She had to start again every day to forgive, to dialogue, to weave and re-weave relationships. Let us entrust ourselves to her and ask for the gift of being peacemakers in our environments, in our homes, in our parishes, in the neighbourhood where we live. Peace lived among us will be the most beautiful witness to the love of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit who embraces and gives life to all creatures.