

MARY – MOTHER OF FREEDOM

(The grace of pilgrimage as a grace of freedom)

KwF (1946) 250-254 (Closing Conference)

Germany had survived the Second World War. Hitler's despotic rule had been broken, the persecution of Christians and Jews had ended. The consequences of the war could be felt everywhere – hunger, shortages of wood and coal in winter, destroyed cities and towns, streets and railways. The consequences for families were that many men had fallen in battle, or else were prisoners of war, the women had to struggle to keep their families going. In a military and political sense Germany had lost its sovereignty, it had been divided into four zones by the victors – the American, British, French and Russian occupation zones.

Every war creates deep insecurity for the people, so for the German people their cultural and moral lives were in disarray. All the old values had collapsed. They had publicly lost their good name and face. They felt humiliated, they had lost their sound self-esteem.

It was in this difficult situation that Fr Kentenich held a retreat course for the Schoenstatt diocesan priests on the free person,

and presented Mary as the Mother of true freedom. He was less concerned about the political situation. His main concern was the moral insecurity of the people. He set up a hopeful programme: the “battle for true freedom”.

[Mary – the Mother of true freedom]

[250] At the close of the retreat we are interested in two main thoughts: the Mother of God as the Mother of our freedom. As the Mother of true freedom she wants to help us to acquire genuine freedom.

[The life-generating force of the sun]

“When I am raised up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself” [John 12,32]. Jesus, the Sun of Justice, said this of himself. When the sun has reached its zenith, look at how it attracts everything to itself. The flowers lift their faces, the streams murmur, the animals become more lively, people breathe more freely. The same applies to Christ, the supernatural Sun. Christ now rules up in heaven. Look at how he draws everything to himself from heaven!

However, from a certain point of view, the Blessed Mother may be called not just the moon, but also the sun. It is also true to say of her [in a certain sense]: “When I am raised up, I will draw everything to myself”. The Blessed Mother has been lifted up, she appears as the Great Sign in the heavens; she is clothed with the sun [Rev 12,1]. She is a sort of sun. She draws everything to herself.

[Our petition: Form the kingdom of freedom in us]

This time I would like to beseech her for the grace that as the Mother Thrice Admirable and Queen of Schoenstatt she should form her Son’s kingdom, as the kingdom of freedom, in us. “I was leading them with human ties, with leading-strings of love” [Hos 11,4]. She should draw me to herself with the bonds of truly motherly love. She should bridge my miseries. Would it not be worth our while at the end of our retreat to renew our consecration, our covenant of love with the Mother of God? “I love those who love me!” I want her to love me; I want her to give me the blessing of freedom. So we give her ourselves and all our misery and helplessness. We then know that “Totum pro toto” [1](#), we may expect “everything for everything”.

[1. Mary’s eyes – our eyes]

[Our earthly eyes – Mary’s eyes of faith]

Should we not offer our Blessed Mother our eyes: the eyes of our minds and souls, our physical eyes? [In the little consecration we pray:] “My Queen, my Mother, ... and to show my devotion to you, I consecrate to you this day my eyes.” Let these be beseeching eyes, pure eyes, celestial eyes that want to see Eternal Light, that want to look over into the next world. We have spoken about making all created things transparent. Lift up your heart, your eyes! We need **the eyes of faith** that only see the divine everywhere. [If we look at ourselves honestly] we will realize that our eyes are still completely earthly; they want to enjoy things, they are often strongly attracted in every way by the appeal of what is earthly and created.

[Mary’s warm and loving eyes – kind and understanding]

The Mother of God should give us her eyes. How can we describe her eyes? They are **eyes that radiate warmth and love** ; they follow us constantly with great love. They are eyes that see more deeply, they are kind eyes. The whole of the Bible, in particular the Book of Revelations, points out that Christ [1/252], the King of kings, surrounds us with his presence: “I know your activities, your hard work...” (Rev 2,2. 9. 19; 3,1. 8. 15]. What a consolation it is to know this. So these are **knowing eyes** , kind eyes, that constantly keep us in view.

How should I imagine these eyes? Tobias' mother was waiting for her son, who had gone on a journey with the Angel Raphael. However, she waited and waited and he did not come. She could no longer bear to remain in the house. She had to climb a mountain to look out to see whether he son was not returning home soon. This is how I should imagine the motherly eyes of the Blessed Mother.

My eyes should also become clear and supernatural.

[Mary's eyes keep watch over my inner struggles]

The eyes of the Blessed Mother are looking at me, they have been turned to me [in the past], they turn to me again and again, bringing blessing. "Turn your eyes to us", we have prayed so often in the Salve Regina. She will turn her eyes to us increasingly also in the time to come.

Or, think of a child that is ill, desperately ill. The mother remains at her child's bedside and never tires; day and night she allows herself no rest, she is constantly keeping watch. I may imagine the same of our Lady's eyes, her **eyes keep watch**.

If the Blessed Mother does not look at us, as St Bonaventure said, or as St Anselm or St Bernard taught, we will not receive the graces we expect. If we apply this to ourselves, it means that if

she does not keep watch over us, if [her motherly gaze does not] follow us kindly and lovingly, we will never receive the great gift of inner freedom. [/253] We will never have enough strength to battle against all the fetters within ourselves in order to attain the great good of genuine freedom.

[Mary's motherly eyes kept watch over the life of Jesus]

It was St Bernard who first formulated the principle: What the Blessed Mother did to care for our Lord, she also does for us. How did she keep watch over our Lord? Her loving eyes followed him from the crib to the cross. A mother's eyes always kept watch over our Lord.

[Mary's motherly eyes keep watch over my life]

[As a baptized Christian] I am like our Lord [for the Blessed Mother]. What he experienced with his mother, she also gives me, in particular if I am a priest, since I become his [Christ's] image and likeness to an extraordinary degree, and also want to become his image and likeness. Mary's eyes always accompanied our Lord throughout his life, and that included his public life, bringing him joy and happiness. When I am working [as a priest] her eyes are constantly directed towards me. She turns her eyes to me, and in return my eyes are turned to her. I have given her my eyes, and in return she gives all her attention and vigilance to me.

[She accompanies me, even when I feel abandoned by God]

Even when our Lord was hanging on the cross, when he was abandoned by God, [she accompanied him with her watchful gaze]. The saints tell us that Jesus' experience of being abandoned by God must have been terrible indeed. However, being abandoned by God did not mean being abandoned by Mary.

In the lives of richly graced people we can observe that when God abandons a highly striving person, and leads him into the mystical state [of the dark night], the Blessed Mother nevertheless keeps watch over him and helps him. How often the soul doesn't know whether it is coming or going; it feels that it has been abandoned by Christ, by God the Father. Strangely enough, in such circumstances the soul's great consolation is always the Blessed Mother. She may and must be to me what she was to our Lord.

[Mary's eyes are powerful, so she can help me battle for freedom]

Think of how **powerful**, and not just loving, these eyes are. "Veni, vidi, vici!" [2](#) What a consolation for me! How often I may have tried to shake off this or that fetter. I wanted to do it on my own, I wanted to win inner freedom of my own strength, but I have forgotten to call upon the Blessed Mother for help. When she

really answers my beseeching look with her powerful gaze, when she answers my cry for help, will I then not be able to say: “Veni, vidi, vici”? She has been victorious over the devil, over the passions that do not want to loosen their grip on me. May this become more and more a reality!

[Inner freedom as the grace of spiritual transformation from the shrine]

Let us set aside all masculine obstinacy; let us join our hands [and ask her like a child] to give us this spiritual transformation, the grace of inner freedom, as a grace of pilgrimage. “What you received was not the spirit of slavery to bring you back into fear; you received the spirit of adoption, enabling us to cry out, ‘Abba, Father!’” (Rom 8.15).

[In Heavenwards] we pray: “I know this wonderland...” ³ If only the whole Schoenstatt Movement were to pursue these miracles! We do not look for miracles of healing or raising the dead, or miracles in the natural order, but miracles of grace, in particular the great miracle of perfect, inner freedom. Could not even I become a miracle of grace in which the glory of the freedom of God’s children shines out? Let us ask the Blessed Mother to reveal this glory in us. Then I will proclaim this freedom out of gratitude – how she, the free, also sets me free.

[2. Mary’s powerful hands and our hands]

[Go through life hand in hand with Mary]

We give ourselves to the Blessed Mother when we renew our consecration. We not only want to offer her our eyes, our ears, but also our hands. Also my hands should belong to our Lady. They are weak hands, dirty hands. I want my hands to be united with our Lady's hands; they should enter into a covenant with her, so that I can go through life hand in hand with her. If the Mother of God gives us her hands in this way, we need have no fear.

Let us recall the picture in the Bible of **St Peter on the high seas** (Mt 14,28-31). He saw our Lord walking towards them on the water, so he jumped into the water. He doubted and at the same time began to sink. Our Lord's hand caught him and saved him from the waves.

[Our times and world are like a stormy, churned up sea]

In the same way we also want to hold onto the hand of our Lady, to go hand in hand with her. How can we describe her hand? The world is a sea, an ocean. We who are older know how unstable we are, we know our many and varied difficulties and hang-ups. We feel that we are right to use the picture: ***the world is a single, great churned-up ocean***. How often [1/256] we have been in danger of drowning. Often we have not even realized it. Also in

the time to come we may be exposed to the greatest dangers, even if these are only the danger of half-heartedness, of being exhausted and spiritually paralysed. Lord, help us, we are perishing! The Blessed Mother wants to reach out to us, she wants to found her kingdom [through us]. Think of how often she has saved us from our own miseries and difficulties, from the surging waves and storms of the ocean.

[We receive graces through Mary's hands]

Let us recall what the teachers of the spiritual life and the Popes have constantly repeated, in particular in the last years: No grace is given to us without the Blessed Mother playing her part. Her hands are filled.

[St Brigid's vision – our Lady's hands are filled]

During a mystical vision St Brigid saw our Lady's hands filled with gold, pearls and diamonds. This is a symbol of what her powerful hands have to offer us. Gold symbolises her protection, pearls her guidance, diamonds her blessing.
The Blessed Mother's hands are spread over us. We take hold of her hand and so of her glory: the gold of her protection, the pearls of her guidance, the diamonds of her blessing.

[Mary's hands protect the king]

The gold of protection. We are told that the King of Aragon had grown tired of the battle with the Saracens and was in danger of being taken prisoner. He did not want to fall into the hands of unbelievers, so he decided to fall on his own sword. Suddenly [/ 257] his mother seemed to stand before him. She tore the sword out of his hands. He returned to the battle against the Saracens with new courage and won the victory.

[Mary's hands have protected us in danger]

Whoever is tossed to and fro on the seas of life – and most of us are – [knows from our own experience in times of need how to appreciate the gold of protection]. We were not mollicoddled as we grew up, the bullets whistled around our ears in the past years in one way or another. How many dangers passed us by without our even being aware of them? Am I not justified in saying that our Lady was the mother who tore the sword out of my hands, who saved me from temptations and the immediate danger of sin [or other dangers]? Let us thank her most sincerely for it!

We do not want to absorb these thoughts merely in a theoretical and very general sense, we want to look back [very personally] and prove: Here and there I was personally in immediate danger of sin, or in danger of losing my ideal. Sometimes it was very little things [that would have meant the loss of my vocation]. Only one more tiny step and everything would have been lost. If a door had

opened, we would have staggered through, or perhaps the door was open and was suddenly closed. If we think that this one or that was laicised, they failed seriously in their dealings with women, but I have not, although the danger was great.

[Mary's powerful hand strengthens me on the road to freedom]

Our Lady's hand, her loving and powerful hand, has held me. That is why I take hold of the gold in the hands of the blessed among women with great gratitude. As long as I keep hold of this hand [/258] and renew my covenant of love with her, I will experience her protection. She has preserved me until now from misusing my freedom. The goal [we pursue in Schoenstatt] is, however, far higher than this – we aim at the freedom of God's children. The Mother of God should protect me by preserving me from greater dangers and giving me the strength not to misuse my freedom.

“Where generosity, a sense of decency,
overcome the downward pull [of nature];
where God's least wishes are binding
and give rise to joyful decision;
where according to the fundamental law of love
it always makes its way victoriously.

I know this wonderland...” [4](#)

[The high ideal of freedom in practical terms]

What should our Lady protect? My generosity, my high-mindedness, my sense of decency. If this is given to me, our Family will again become strong.

We feel how extremely difficult it is for us to be inwardly free of our bodies [with their drives]. In addition, we should love one another. What a burden [challenge] this can be for our freedom. The Blessed Mother should and will protect us. Let us take hold of her hand as we go out to our pastoral work, when we foster our family spirit. This is the way we want to oppose the dragon within us, this is the way we want to break the fetters of slavery.

[Hands that lead us safely on our way]

The pearls of guidance. Let us again take hold of her hand. We also feel the pearls, that is, her guidance. We feel how the Family has been most wonderfully guided in the past years. [5](#) Each one of us can say this in some way or other [1/259].

When ***St Francis Xavier*** looked back on his life, he said: How many steps I have taken in the course of my life; but each step was guided by the hand of the blessed among women. That is why I have the courage to entrust myself to her guidance also in the future, and allow her to lead me through the dark gates of death.

[Guidance in Schoenstatt's history – in the past and in the future]

History opens up a vast panorama before us of the wonderful guidance our Family as a whole has experienced through the dangers of the past. We may expect the same wonderful guidance through the dangers of the time to come. How securely we stand!

Did we, the Federation priests, stand the test as well as the other branches of the Family? For the sake of being honest with ourselves, it is worth our while to ask whether we are as united today as the other branches of the Family? A certain slackening has taken place; there is not just tiredness in our striving upwards, but also in our relationship to one another. God has ordained a tremendous amount in the past years, he sent us many battles. There is hardly any community that has been so persecuted by the Gestapo as ours has. We have come safely through all the dangers and threats of death. We may repeat the words of St Francis Xavier in their fullest sense: Every step we have taken in the past was wonderfully guided by the blessed among women. Therefore, when we look into the future, we should be filled with

absolute security and dependability, with unqualified optimism. We will be victorious, we will not be destroyed, [1/260] we believe in our mission! We will carry out the tasks [placed before us], even if they constantly grow in size so that, humanly speaking, we are startled by them. So, remain faithful to the covenant, renew the covenant of love.

The diamonds of blessings. Let us take hold of our Lady's hand for a third time. We have already discovered gold and pearls in it. Now we also discover the diamonds. The diamonds are blessings. Let us look back into the past and see how we were in the greatest need in the years gone by.

Look at how the Blessed Mother has proved herself [in the time of Nazi domination, in particular in the concentration camp at Dachau] as the Mother who gives grace, bread and a home!

[She showed that she is] the **Mother who gives bread.** Look at how often she saved us from financial need.

[We experienced the blessing of being at home]

As the **Mother who creates a home.** In the past years have we not all been able to uphold the awareness of being at home: at home in the hearts of noble-minded people, at home in the Family, at home in the heart of the Blessed Mother, at home in

Schoenstatt? Truly we may even say that at this place [ie, in Schoenstatt and the original shrine], the Blessed Mother has proved that she is so wonderful that after my return [from Dachau] we felt moved to regard this place as a terra ter admirabilis [a thrice admirable land], and ourselves as filii ter admirabiles [thrice admirable sons]. “The ground on which you are standing is holy ground” (cf Ex 3,5). When we give her something, she returns it in even richer measure. How much protection and blessing we have experienced!

[A hopeful look into the future – we will become free]

We look forward with great confidence to receiving blessings also in the future. Also in the time to come she will show me that she is the Mother who gives grace, the Mother of freedom, the Mother who gives bread, the Mother of our home. She will preserve my home in the heart of the Family, in the hearts of my confreres. Even if she wants to withdraw an earthly home in the heart of people, she will all the more offer me a home in the heart of the Triune God instead. That is why I need not fear, I need not worry, I am not pessimistic as I go out from here. My fight for freedom must one day be victorious. We are hopeful. Yes, the time will come when we will be able to say: We are free! Otherwise Purgatory will make up for what we still lack!

[3. Mary’s heart and my heart]

[The struggle to love one another]

The heart of our Lady is the third bond. We want to be immersed in Mary's heart. We know how many fine threads try again and again to drag us downwards. We know that our own hearts will betray us, that this heart feels that there is a serpent within it. We know that this serpent can spit out poison in every direction. ***That is why we have struggled to fuse our hearts. I give my heart to the Blessed Mother, then her heart will love me so warmly that it will give itself to me again. So vis amari, ama!***⁶ The Blessed Mother is awaiting my love. She wants me to love her. She must even do so, because she is wholly in tune with God's and our Lord's wishes. "This is your son, this is your mother!" (John 19,26). That was a divine commission to love us. She has to want to do so. In addition, she knows better than we do that unless we love her, our salvation is insufficiently secured. In Fatima we hear her repeated admonition: It depends on me! From Fatima she demanded our love. So she knows about the great principles of [God's kingdom]. If we want to love her; if we should love her, and if she is justified in demanding that we love her, she must, for her part, give us her heart.

[Mary's love for me cost her great sacrifice]

She has given us her heart. I am thinking of her life. What was it like? Can we not take it for granted that our Lady was prepared to pay a great price in order to love me? This is what gives love for Mary so much dynamism. She had to pay a great price for our

redemption. “This is my beloved son!” She, too, can say: I loved the world so much that I gave up my Son. She freely chose and willed to stand beneath the cross, she gave up her “rights as a mother”:

“There I see your motherly heart renouncing strongly,
and courageously destroying every right as a mother;
you give yourself with your only-begotten Son
to the Father on the throne for the salvation of the world.” [7](#)

Let us take the prayer “After the Angelus” from “Heavenwards” for meditation:

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“The Lord chose you, Mother,
to be his helper for the salvation of the world.
You stand at his side to help him at all times
as his bridal deacon;
with your strong and virginal attitude
you are the one who kills the serpent.

In silent service you prepare him
to be the sacrificial gift.

As the one who serves at the sacrifice
you present him in the temple to the Father.

Together with him you sacrifice yourself for us
on the altar of the cross.

Through you he give graces, as the fruit of the sacrifice,
to everyone who seeks them.

Father, we ask you simply:

May the light of faith burn brightly in us,
so that we may see our Mother clearly
and trust in her as Mediatrix.

Grant that we may always follow her example,
so that with willing and joyful readiness to serve
we may sacrifice ourselves, in a way that pleases you,

as instruments for the salvation of the world,
so that Satan's power may be broken,
which constantly engenders hatred and discord:
through Christ who, to your greater glory,
lets us share in his mediation."

Her threefold function as **deacon** is mentioned in this prayer: Of her own free choice and decision she gave up all her rights as a Mother; she freely chose and willed to hand over her Son to the Father for us, so that he could be sacrificed on the cross for the redemption of the world; and as the deacon she united herself with the Redeemer.

[Remaining faithful to love even to martyrdom]

St Fidelis of Sigmaringen preached to the Calvinists in Switzerland. For years he had been praying to God for two things: that he should never commit a mortal sin in his life, and that he might be given the grace of martyrdom. The Calvinists killed him on 24 April 1622 in a very cruel manner with their swords and hayforks. Calling out "Jesus, Mary, come to my aid! My God!" he died of his wounds as the first Capuchin martyr. That is how deeply and warmly the Blessed Mother loves me.

[Three things can reduce our love]

Nothing can reduce her love for me. We talk about the wounds of love that can kill us. What do we mean? They could be the length of time, ingratitude and death.

[a. Faithfulness over time]

When people are in love, what is their love like? The stimulus of novelty keeps their love warm. However, in the course of time their love often cools, or becomes cold. This is not the case with our Lady. Her love is not decreased over the course of time, she remains faithful to me. Why? Because she is my mother, because she knows how God, our Lord, shed his blood for me and cares for me from heaven. A mother's heart is always keeping watch.

[b. Faithful even when separated and if we are forgetful]

How can love be diminished? By separation. I have often separated myself from the Blessed Mother, I have forgotten her, just as I forget supernatural things. Often I have given up and torn the bonds of love apart. Nevertheless, the Blessed Mother [265] loves me, she is an ocean of mercy. She loves me. The Father has entrusted me to her. She will repeatedly give me her motherly protection.

[c. Faithful even when we are ungrateful]

What can diminish love? Ingratitude causes love to cool. Whoever loves, also wants to have something for themselves. How ungrateful we often are towards the Blessed Mother! Let us say thank you in retrospect. The Mother of God does not let herself be confused by my lack of gratitude.

[d. Faithful until death]

What can diminish love? Death. Our Lady's love for me will not be diminished even by death. Even when we die she will be at our side to help us.

So, come what may, "It remains, we shall be faithful!" Let us renew our covenant of love with the Blessed Mother,

"And to show my devotion to you,

I consecrate to you this day

my eyes, my ears,

my mouth, my heart,

myself without reserve.

As I am your own, my dear Mother,

guard me,

protect me,

as your property and your possession.”

What matters is the **today**. If I have given myself to her in this way, she will protect me. She will protect me, just as she had to protect herself. She will look after me as though she had to look after herself. So, if I entrust my fight for freedom and all my needs, no matter what they may be, to her, the moment will come when I will be able to say: “Ireland is free!”

[The dream of freedom will become a reality one day]

[266] O’Connell has gone down in history as the great fighter for Ireland’s freedom (1775-1847). When he was still small he used to sit on the window seat to do his homework. His father passed by with one of his friends. They were discussing politics and did not notice that the boy was listening to them. Suddenly he jumped up from the window seat. He had followed all that they had said about the slavery and suppression of his people. With his cheeks aglow and his fists clenched he called out: “I tell you, Ireland will be set free!” The boy saw it as his lifework to ensure that Ireland should become free.

When we apply this to ourselves: Also the Ireland of our suffering people shall and will be set free again. [8](#)

O'Connell [9](#) grew up, went to boarding school and completed his education. One of the teachers gave him a **Rosary** when he said good-bye. He entered public life. He took up the battle with the Parliament in England, where the members trembled when he spoke. The crowds cheered him and carried him on their shoulders. While they did so, he prayed the Rosary. The Mother of God had made him a fighter for freedom. As he died he called out: At least Ireland is free to practice its religion! He was not allowed to experience its political freedom. Almost 200 years later, in 1921, Ireland became a free and independent state.

Our goal is to fight for true freedom under the protection of the Blessed Mother. We are fighting so that our Schoenstatt Family may become a kingdom of freedom. We are fighting so that, to start with, our people and our country may become inwardly free. We can then be sure that we will have done our best, so that our people may re-conquer its economic, social and political freedom in the course of time. Germany should again become free under the protection of the Mother Thrice Admirable and Queen of Schoenstatt. When we die, we will be able to say with O'Connell: "Ireland has been set free!"

Questions for reflection

1. Fr Kentenich speaks of O'Connell, Ireland's hero of freedom. Who are the heroes of freedom in India; who can give us light and encourage us on the way towards our own freedom?
2. What is the difference – political, economic, and above all, psychological – between liberation, independence and freedom?
3. Why is forgetfulness an obstacle on the way towards our freedom?
4. Freedom needs to be protected. Why? What sort of protection is meant (control, institution, walls, trust, reliability)?
5. What are the enemies or dangers to freedom?
6. Are friendships, group or community membership, more of a help or a hindrance on the way to becoming free? Quote practical examples from life.

7. Where would you find it easier to learn freedom: At home in your own family, in the seminary, in the Regency, in a hostel, or in a room in a city?

8. Have you experienced that the covenant of love with the Mother of God helps you to become more free? Yes or no? How?

FOOTNOTES

[1](#):

The covenant of love is reciprocal, it is based on mutual love: whoever gives everything will also receive everything; whoever gives everything without reserve will receive just as much, and even more. In what follows, Fr Kentenich illustrates this reciprocity using the hands and eyes as a symbol.

[2](#):

“I came, I saw, I conquered”. This saying is attributed to the Roman general, Julius Caesar. It indicates how securely, rapidly and powerfully Mary will win the victory.

3:

Cf. Heavenwards, 158-161. The individual verses of the “Hymn of Home” praise the effectiveness of the grace of spiritual transformation in building up a kingdom of love for others, of purity, of inner freedom, of love and justice, as Tabor graces and the courage to fight.

4:

Heavenwards, p.159.

5:

This refers to the years of Nazi domination and persecution, in particular for those in prison and concentration camp.

6:

If you want to be loved, you must be the first to love.

7:

Cf Heavenwards, 53, Golgotha Hour

8:

Fr Kentenich was referring to the political and moral situation of Germany after the Second World War.

[9](#):

Irish politician, who aroused popular support in the 1820s for the right of Roman Catholics to sit in the British parliament. Himself a Catholic, his election as MP for Clare in 1828 forced the government to concede Catholic emancipation. He subsequently worked for the repeal of union with Britain, but lost the backing of the more revolutionary Young Ireland group. (Macmillan Encyclopoedia 1987).