

**HOMILY OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE**  
**APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**  
**175<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE APPARITION OF OUR LADY OF LA SALETTE**  
**NATIONAL SHRINE OF OUR LADY OF LA SALETTE**  
**ATTLEBORO, MASSACHUSETTS**  
**SEPTEMBER 19, 2021**

My Dear Friends in Christ,

As the Apostolic Nuncio, the representative of the Holy Father to the United States, I greet you warmly in his name, and I express the spiritual closeness and paternal affection of Pope Francis, assuring you of his prayers. I thank Father Flavio Gillio, MS, the Director of Ministries at the Shrine for his kind invitation.

As we celebrate the 175th anniversary of the appearance of Our Lady to the shepherd children, Maximin and Melanie, we recall that the message of Mary was given at a time of great suffering. Peoples were scourged by famine, subjected to many injustices. Indifference or hostility toward the gospel message worsened. Their times are not unlike ours, marked profoundly by the suffering of the pandemic; the scourge of war; polarization in our neighborhoods, family, and in the country; and the rise of secularization and open hostility toward people of faith.

At La Salette, Mary appeared bearing on her breast the likeness of her crucified Son, by whose Cross she stood faithfully. Our Lady showed herself associated to the work of salvation, experiencing compassion for the trials of her children, suffering when they strayed from the Church of Christ as they forgot or rejected the presence of God in their lives, including the blessedness of his Name.

Today, some want to emphasize only the dire consequences of a failure to return to God and especially Sunday Mass foretold by Our Lady, but the message of La Salette is one of hope. In our First Reading, God established His covenant with Noah, the sign of which was the rainbow. This marks the start of something new: God began to freely establish covenants with humanity.

With this covenant, God established a covenant with all creation, promising never again to destroy His creation by a flood. While God made other covenants – with Abraham; with Moses and the Hebrew people; and with King David – the covenant here is one which points to the new and eternal covenant.

Of this covenant, the medieval Benedictine, Rupert of Deutz, writes:

“Therefore, that rainbow which appears in the clouds is a sign of the Son of God. It is a sign that God will never again destroy flesh by the waters of the flood; the Son of God Himself ... is forever a sign which reminds God the Father. He is an eternal memorial of our peace: now that He in His flesh has destroyed the old enmity, friendship between God and men is secure: men are no longer servants but friends and children of God.” (RUPERT OF DEUTZ, *COMMENTARIUM IN GENESIM*, 4, 36)

At La Salette, Mary, manifested her sadness that the friendship offered by her Son was rejected. The tears of Our Lady help us understand the seriousness of sin and the denial of God: they leave us

without the hope, symbolized by the rainbow and the covenant offered to Noah, without hope of a better day after the storms of this life. Mary's sadness is compounded by the way her children are treated.

In his encyclical letter *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis wrote:

“Disregard for the duty to cultivate and maintain a proper relationship with my neighbor, for whose care and custody I am responsible, ruins my relationship with my own self, with others, with God and with the earth. ... We see this in the story of Noah, where God threatens to do away with humanity because of its constant failure to fulfil the requirements of justice and peace: “I have determined to make an end of all flesh; for the earth is filled with violence through them” (*Gen* 6:13). These ancient stories, full of symbolism, bear witness to a conviction ... that everything is interconnected, and that genuine care for our own lives and our relationships with nature is inseparable from fraternity, justice and faithfulness to others.” (Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si*, 24 May 2015, 70)

The apparition at La Salette is an invitation to deeper fidelity to the covenant established by God with all creation through Noah and to the new and eternal covenant established through the outpouring of His Son's own Blood. It is an invitation to penance and conversion. The emphasis is not only on turning away from sin but also on turning our hearts toward the Lord, who makes all things new.

In the Second Reading, Paul writes to the Corinthians reminding them that *If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old order has passed away; now all is new!* Paul is quick to point out that this has been done, not by us, but by God who reconciled us to Himself. *In Christ, God was reconciling the whole world to Himself, not counting men's transgressions against them*, but rather transforming them to be missionaries of His mercy and reconciliation, *ambassadors for Christ*.

As the Apostolic Nuncio, I know something about being an ambassador, but even before Paul, Mary was an ambassador of God. She went forth with a joyful message to her kinswoman Elizabeth and John the Baptist following the Annunciation. Salvation was at hand. God was close to His people after a long period of darkness. Mary has appeared all over the world inviting her children to prayer, to penance, and to live the fullness of life offered by her Son.

Twenty-five years ago, writing to Bishop Dufaux of Grenoble, Saint John Paul II spoke, not only of Mary as an ambassador of reconciliation but also of the shepherd children:

“The Virgin bids us regain spiritual composure. She invites us to penance, to perseverance in prayer, and especially to fidelity in the observance of Sunday. Through the witness of the two children, she asks that her message be made known to all her people. Indeed, the children's voice was heard. Pilgrims came. There were many conversions. Mary appeared in a light reminiscent of the splendor of a humanity transformed by the Resurrection of Christ: La Salette is a message of hope a hope sustained by the intercession of her who is the Mother of all peoples.” (Letter of Pope John Paul II to Bishop Louis Dufaux, 6 May 1996)

If then, she asked it of the shepherds, now she asks it of us. Pope Francis has emphasized God's mercy, and, at the conclusion of the Jubilee Year of Mercy, he remarked that the Year of Mercy could not simply be a parenthesis in the life of the Church. Rather, mercy is the way in which we make known the

presence of Christ in the human reality as the Church. We are to be ambassadors of Christ in the same manner Mary and the shepherd children were.

To be an effective ambassador, one needs credibility. If we are to be credible witnesses to mercy, then we need to personally be converted through an encounter with Jesus Christ. A credible witness is also one who is faithful. Our short Gospel began with these words: *Near the cross of Jesus, there stood His mother.* The Virgin who appeared at La Salette was the same woman who faithfully stood by the Cross at Calvary.

Before dying, Jesus saw her with the beloved disciple and said: *“Woman, behold, your son!”* and asked her to the care for the disciple as a son. He continued, speaking to the disciple: *“Behold, your mother!”* From that hour, the beloved disciple took his mother Mary “to his own home” or rather into his inner life - *“eis tà idia”*. This means introducing the Virgin into the fabric of one’s very being; it is not merely some external practice; rather, it is our way of living as Catholics.

Let us contemplate the “light that appeared on the mountain”, expressing our gratitude to God for the graces poured out through Our Lady’s appearance at La Salette, while committing ourselves to being true sons and daughters of Mary, ambassadors of Christ, instruments of reconciliation, mercy, and hope.