

**NATIONAL PILGRIMAGE TO THE SHRINE
OF OUR LADY OF THE TAPER, CARDIGAN.**

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21 MAY 2017 – 6TH SUNDAY OF EASTER

When you enter a Catholic church you are immediately surrounded by signs, symbols and sacraments which speak to us in a wordless language about the deep truths of our faith. So much of what we believe about God, or more importantly what God believes about us, cannot be put into words. It is too deep for words, it goes beyond words.

Today, on this National Pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady of the Taper, we are invited to think and pray about her unique role in the unfolding of the history of salvation. The medieval origin of the devotion is well known to those who love this shrine. But it is the candle she holds, which reminds us of the words of Jesus which come down through the ages. *“I am the Light of the World”* (John 8:12). That candle also reminds us of the obedient response of Mary who listened not just with her ears but with her heart. Her words to the servants at the Wedding Feast of Cana are spoken to us as well: *“Do whatever he tells you”* (John 2:5-8).

The devotions we have to Our Lady, and the faith we have in her, remind me of a mosaic, or a tapestry being put together, only being seen from the back, not being fully understood until the whole

picture is turned around and is completely revealed. Her Immaculate Conception; a sign and symbol of everything humanity could have been, untouched by the original sin of pride and disobedience committed by Adam and Eve. In Mary, God foresaw one who would never allow sin to come between her and his will. *“Be it done unto me according to thy word”* (Luke 1:38). Never separated from God in life, therefore not separated from him in death, untied with him in her Assumption, that union with God in heaven for which we all long. She is a sign and symbol of everything we one day shall be.

And she is also an inspiration and guide to us all in our pilgrim journey through this life. She can speak to the exile and refugee through her experience of the flight into Egypt. To perplexed mothers as she searched for her lost son in the Temple. *“My son, why have you done this to us”* (Luke 2:48). As she stood at the foot of the cross she knew suffering at first hand. That is why Our Lady of Sorrows has a great deal to teach us as we face the mystery of suffering in every time and place and life.

The titles under which we honour Mary address different times and circumstances and cultures, each one of which speaks in their own way of one or other aspect of faith. This year we are celebrating the centenary of the apparitions of Mary at Fatima. Who would have thought that one hundred years later we are still facing the turmoil foretold in those apparitions, not least with the actions of Russia in the Ukraine and Syria, the apparent undermining of democracy in the American and French elections and the danger of nuclear catastrophe in North Korea? Our Lady of the Taper, Our Lady of Penrhys, Our Lady of Lourdes, Our Lady of Walsingham, Our Lady of

Knock and so many others. Each open up a path to understanding why we describe her as *“the highest honour of our race”* (Judith 13:18).

One of the favourite theologians of Pope Benedict XVI was Hans Urs von Balthazar. Von Balthazar often meditated on the text from the Book of Apocalypse – *“...a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars”* (Revelation 12:1). He described these stars as a “constellation” surrounding Mary, a light helping us to see and understand her son Jesus not just in history but present in the Church. Those stars illuminate her qualities: Mary is the woman of faith. She is the woman of obedience. She is the woman of humility. She conceives Jesus in her heart before conceiving him in her woman. The Litany of Our Lady of Walsingham puts it powerfully when it prays:

Woman of Faith – Remember us to God

Woman who wondered – Remember us to God

Woman of Obedience – Remember us to God

Being here in the heart of Wales, what better way to finish this homily than quoting from the Jesuit poet Gerard Manly Hopkins who lived at St. Beuno’s in North Wales. He took one of the titles with which we invoke Our Lady from the Litany of Loreto – the Mystical Rose. This is what he wrote:

Is Mary the rose then? Mary the tree?

But the blossom, the blossom there – who can it be?

Who can her rose be? It could but be One -

Christ Jesus her Lord, her God and her Son.

In the gardens of God, in the daylight divine,

Show me this son, mother, mother of mine.