"HUMBLE AND HIGHEST CREATURE"
Walking with Mary, Mistress of Integral ecology

2. The Queen of whole creation

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After describing Mary's maternal care for Jesus and all creatures, in No. 241 of the Encyclical '*Laudato Si*', the Pope invites us to fix our gaze on her present condition: "She lives with Jesus completely transfigured, and all creatures sing of her beauty. [...] Elevated to heaven, she is the Mother and Queen of all creation. In her glorified body, together with the Risen Christ, part of creation has reached the fullness of its beauty."

In his catechesis of July 23, 1997, Pope John Paul II had well explained the meaning of the popular custom of invoking Mary as Queen. This is a very ancient invocation, probably dating back to the fifth century, when the Council of Ephesus proclaimed Mary "Mother of God," and the Christian people felt the need to exalt her above all creatures, thus recognizing her extraordinary dignity and her intercessory role in the life of each individual believer and the whole world.

Even the Second Vatican Council, after recalling the Virgin's assumption "to heavenly glory in body and soul," refers to her as Queen and explains that she was "exalted by the Lord as Queen of the universe, that she might be more fully conformed to her Son, Lord of the rulers (cf. Rev. 19:16), and victor over sin and death" (Lumen Gentium 59). The conciliar text thus refers to Pius XII's Encyclical, *Ad coeli Reginam*, which reminds us that Mary's queenship has to do not only with the mystery of the Incarnation, that is, with her being the Mother of God, but also with her presence at the foot of the Cross, where the first Christians recognized in Her the New Eve, who mysteriously participates alongside Christ the New Adam in the redemption of humanity.

Christ's kingship, in fact, on which Mary's queenship depends and descends, is not only due to His being the Son of God: it is in the consummation of Easter, in fact, that all of creation is recapitulated in Christ and that He becomes fully its head. This is why Mark's Gospel states that on Ascension Day the Lord Jesus "was taken up into heaven and seated at the right hand of God" (Mark 16:19). "To sit at the right hand of God," in biblical language means to share God's kingship over the created universe.

In the resurrected body of Christ and the glorified body of Mary, however, it is not only the Son and the Mother in their individuality who receive the crown. It is the whole creation that already and not yet attains the fullness of its beauty. Are not all the elements of creation, in fact, somehow enclosed and collected in the very living body of the human being? Water, which constitutes him 60 percent; earth, on which he is nourished and which remains in him in the form, for example, of minerals; fire, that is, the heat or rather the energy it produces and which keeps him alive; and air, finally, or rather the breath which, according to the book of Genesis, the human being shares with God (Gen 1:7). In the glorified bodies of the Son and Mother therefore a fragment of creation already fully inhabits the glory of God, anticipating the destiny that awaits the whole creation.

Mary's queenship, of course, in no way replaces her motherhood! On the contrary: Mary's motherhood, her tension to care, deeply defines and characterizes her being queen. Precisely as queen of all creation, Mary has the power to care for all creatures, none excluded. In this regard, Pius XII wrote in the Encyclical already cited, "Having for us a maternal affection and assuming the

interests of our salvation, she extends her solicitude to the whole human race. Established by the Lord as Queen of heaven and earth, elevated above all the choirs of Angels and the entire heavenly hierarchy of Saints, seated at the right hand of her only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, she obtains with great certainty what she asks for with her maternal prayers; what she seeks she finds and cannot lack."

If, therefore, we can continue to experience Mary's loving presence and maternal care in our daily lives today, this is a consequence of her Assumption into Heaven and her participation in the glory of the Risen Christ, which believers have always expressed through the metaphor of kingship and crowning. Put differently: it is intimate communion with God the Father, Son and Spirit that makes Mary Queen of the universe and it is that same communion that enables her to intervene in the lives of men and women of all times. "Assumed to heavenly glory, Mary devotes herself totally to the work of salvation in order to communicate to every living person the happiness she has been granted. She is a Queen who gives all that she possesses, participating above all in the life and love of Christ" (John Paul II).

The heavenly glorification of the Mother of God is as anticipated by the evangelist Luke in the episode of the encounter between Mary and her cousin Elizabeth (Lk. 1:39-56). The fragment of an ancient homily attributed to Origen (3rd AD), comments on the words addressed by Elizabeth to Mary thus: "It is I who should have come to you, for you are blessed above all women, you the mother of my Lord, you my Lady." The shift from the expression "the mother of my Lord" to "my Lady" anticipates what would be forcefully proclaimed a few centuries later by St. John Damascene, who calls Mary ‘Sovereign’: "When she became the mother of the Creator, she truly became the ruler of all creatures."

Perhaps a more explicit prophecy of Mary's royal glorification is found between the lines of the Magnificat song, which the evangelist Luke attributes to Mary herself. Indeed, the song opens with the solemn proclamation of what God has already done for Mary, namely, "He has looked upon the humility of His handmaid." Then, a few verses later, Mary affirms that this is God's typical way of acting, lowering the mighty from their thrones in order to raise up the humble. Mary, therefore, precisely as the "humble servant" is destined to be lifted up. And indeed, she will be, thanks to the ultimate victory over evil and death of the child she carries in her womb.

This is perhaps why Botticelli, in the splendid tondo entitled Madonna of the Magnificat superimposes the two mysteries creating a unique scene: Mary is writing the song of the Magnificat on a book supported by two angels. Her hand is guided by the hand of the child, who sits in her arms, while two other angels place a crown on her head.

Is not God's way of acting sung by Mary in the Magnificat also inscribed, as his law, at the heart of creation? Although it takes the patience of the ages to recognize it, on closer inspection it is not the law of the strongest that prevails on earth, but the law of the alternation of the seasons, the law of the alternation of life and death, in a continuous reversal of fortunes. All of us, on the other hand, are destined to die, and not even the promise of future resurrection can preserve us from this fate.

Let us ask Mary for the grace to look at things and creation history according to the logic of the Magnificat. Recognizing our poverty and opening ourselves to God's action that overturns the fates of the powerful and the humble, in fact, is a fundamental step if we want to truly become God's collaborators for the good of our brothers and sisters and of the House and constitutes an

indispensable moment in that process that Pope Francis points out to all men and women of good will with the expression "ecological conversion."