

## **IN THE COVENANT WITH MARY**

*Excerpts from the sermon given by His Eminence Josef Cardinal Ratzinger, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, to the German-speaking Schoenstatt Family at the Basilica of St. Mary Major in Rome on September 18, 1985.*

You have come here, united with your brothers and sisters who are presently celebrating the Eucharist in twenty-two of the other churches in Rome, in order to renew the covenant of love with Mary in this festive year of the Schoenstatt Family, the 100th birthday of the founder. This covenant is your foundation and constitutes you as Schoenstatt Family.

### ***The Covenant of Love of October 18. 1914 - A Reaching into the Vastness of Eternity***

With this covenant you enter a history which began over 70 years ago, on October 18, 1914 when Joseph Kentenich made the most basic decision of his life. He sealed the covenant with the Mother of Our Lord and thus resolved that in the future he would no longer live his life by his own power and strength. He did not want to simply seek himself and to realize his own ideas, but from this hour onward he chose to live his life in a special relationship, one of union and attachment. He wanted to live his life by letting himself be formed, by listening and by always being ready to receive anew. Such a union, such a covenant was not a pact among the people of this world, not a life out of the powers of this world, but it was a reaching into the vastness of eternity; it was openness for the other world which, however, ceased to be another world for this covenant united both worlds in one. He sealed the covenant with Mary, the Mother of Our Lord, in order to become with her, who is the Church personified, a Church himself. He gave his total, pure yes to the will of God.

### ***In View of the Pacts of Destruction - A Covenant for New Life***

It happened in the fall of 1914, at a time when World War I was raging through the country, at an hour when the secretary of state of Great Britain made the statement that the lights over Europe had been extinguished. It was a time when allies confronted each other with their entire battery of war machinery and proved their own power so that in the end each one could have total possession of the power. These pacts of power became pacts of destruction; their only effectiveness was destruction. They passed and were replaced by other pacts which stand in opposition to each other with even more terrible threats.

In this heavy confrontation of the mighty ones of the earth, the event, the covenant which Joseph Kentenich sealed, appeared totally insignificant, concealed, a personal course of action that could never have changed the way in which the world had begun to destroy itself. But it was just this covenant that created new life. The power of the mighty ones-as I said before-had foremost the power of destruction; but a union of love has the power to generate life. Therefore this covenant of love in comparison to the pacts of the powers of the world was the more permanent one. It

generated life, the family of Jesus Christ which grew beyond the borders of those nations who mutually threatened each other. It created a family over the entire globe, weaving a net of love, a net of goodness right across the boundaries which still separate us today. It is a power which brings forth life, transformation and hope.

### ***The Covenant of Love in Schoenstatt - The Personalization of the Covenant of Salvation***

The covenant of love with Mary-this word conceals one of the key words of Holy Scripture: The word covenant includes the entire hope of Christianity. It assures us that we are not left alone in the world with unknown powers and forces which we cannot comprehend and ultimately cannot tame. It is God who holds the reins in his hands; he knows us and loves us and has entered into a relationship with us. Therefore we can seal a covenant with him because he loved us first and reached out to us. The covenant of love which you re- new today in the followership of Father Kentenich is nothing else but a personalization of the great covenant of salvation history, as the precious mosaics in this the most beautiful of all Marian churches tell us. We make this covenant our own personal covenant as we become one with her, who is the Church personified. God did not intend this covenant to remain with an individual person; he sealed it with the bride of Christ, the Mother, so that we all can partake of this covenant by becoming one heart and one soul with her, united to her and identified with her.

### ***To Become Marian in the Covenant Which Constitutes the Church***

This already gives the answer to a question which is frequently asked. This covenant is the Triune God's covenant with us through the mediator Jesus Christ. If this is so, why would we need Mary? Why would we need another mediator in between if Christ has already become totally one with us? Our Lord himself gives the answer in the Gospel which we have just heard today: In his last words to this world our crucified Lord said to his Mother: "'Woman, there is your son.'" In turn he said to the disciple, 'There is your Mother'" (Jn. 19:26-27). These words affected the act of the foundation of the Church, or we could say, one of the basic presentations of the founding of the Church and the sealing of the covenant. Here the reality of the word becomes visible: The Church comes into being when God makes his covenant, the new covenant with us. He uses Mary's yes once more in a new, more comprehensive way. It was her yes to this Son whom God wanted to give her; it was her yes to the will of God who demanded of her to enter whole- heartedly and mysteriously into the most incomprehensible and greatest event in history. But now at the hour of the cross, at the hour of Jesus Christ, she had to give this yes anew. It took on a still more profound dimension. Now it is a yes to the new son, the other son, who through her should become the same son. In this son it is a yes to all sons and daughters throughout all of history. It is a yes to be at God's disposal throughout all of history.

The Church is founded on this yes of Mary which penetrates the entire span of history. And vice versa: The Church is founded by Our Lord when he gives his Mother to his disciple. He gives us a Mother, his Mother. From this viewpoint we may understand more clearly what 'Church' actually is: The Church is not an apparatus, an amount of bureaucracies, of offices or some sort of activities. The Church is this: we are called into the family of Jesus Christ and into the community of love with him.

His Mother be- comes our Mother and thus we belong together with him. She will form and mould us like a mother forms her child so that we ourselves become Marian and thus the one united Church, which is the bride of the Lamb.

Thus the covenant of love calls us to be united in her and gathered around her, in the family of Jesus Christ, in this family-like confidence which receives the ultimate security in the knowledge that God is near:.

In as much as we become one with Mary, a dwelling place of God in this world, one with her in her yes, the world becomes transformed through love. We want to beg Our Lord to give us this gift to speak our yes fully, and to become a Church with Mary, who is the Church personified. In this spirit we would like to renew our covenant of love.