

THE NEW FEAST DAY TODAY

They all joined in continuous prayer, together with several women, including Mary the Mother of Jesus. We're happy today for the first time to celebrate this new feast of *Mary Mater Ecclesiae*, Mother of the Church. The holy father instituted this feastday by a decree on 11th February this year, the 160th anniversary of Mary's appearances in Lourdes. Appropriately, the new feast is to be kept on the Monday immediately after Pentecost, the Day when, as we heard in the 1stR, the Holy Spirit descended on Mary, Peter and the Apostles, and when the universal mission of the Church began. 'Mother of the Church' is an ancient title, going back to St. Augustine and St. Leo, although it was only formally bestowed on Our Lady in 1964 by Blessed Paul VI at the close of the Second Vatican Council. It was then the new title was added to the *Litany of Loreto* and it's appeared ever since in Catholic prayers and devotions. Mary became the Mother of the Church on Calvary, as we heard in today's Gospel. It was then that the Church poured forth from Jesus's side and He in the person of St. John entrusted it to the care of His Mother. Pope Francis says the new feast has a double purpose: to increase our love for Mary and to encourage within the Church 'maternal love'. Let's return to this in a moment.

For on the internet the other day, I came across searing criticisms of Pope Francis. We live in an era in which many Catholics, even highly-placed ones, readily take to social media and the blogosphere to vent their views and opinions. It's true, the two Synods on the Family in 2014 and '15, and *Amoris Laetitia*, the holy father's follow-on Apostolic Exhortation, have left the waters of the Church turbulent and disturbed, with bishops, Bishops Conferences, even cardinals taking different lines and contradictory approaches. Yet anyone with a sense of history would know the Church has been in such situations before. That's why today's new feast is a huge help. For we need to pray to the Church's Mother for patience and a deeper internal communion based on truth, clarity, justice and mercy in doctrine, life and worship.

But as we said, the holy father wants to encourage within the Church a greater 'maternal love'. In the past we often referred to Mother Church. Today's feast encourages us to revive this. Seeing Mary with St. Peter and the Apostles in the Upper Room is entirely natural, right and proper. Mary was there at all the main points in the life of Christ: His Birth, His public ministry, His death on Calvary, His resurrection and sending of the Spirit. She is our Mother and is with us at all the points of our lives too. Her maternal love suffuses the Body of Christ. Maternal love should therefore suffuse the attitudes, words and deeds of every minister in the Church. A mother's love should also suffuse all of us when we meet the poor, the needy, those adrift and in difficulty.

From that moment, the disciple made a place for Her in his home. Mary surely has a place in *our* home and in our hearts. Let us ask Her today to pray for the Church throughout the world, for the holy father, for bishops, priests and deacons, the religious and for every member of the laity, especially those in need or difficulty. May She speedily obtain for us the grace of Christ her Son. May She help us carry the Cross, so as one day to become worthy of a place with Jesus in heaven.