INTRODUCTION

The Virgin Mary is the most perfect creature who ever came from the hands of God. She is so good, so simple, so delicate, so extraordinarily humble and pure that one cannot help loving her.

Her stay in the world was hardly noticed by her contemporaries. It is the same with our own lives; there is nothing extraordinary, nothing that attracts attention. But in the eyes of God, the Virgin Mary was unique, and her part in creation was indispensable. The Father gave her to us, she gave us the Son, and she gave herself to the Holy Spirit. She gladdens the hearts of her children because she is so loving and has such a maternal heart.

Like the Virgin, however, we also mean something to God, and we have our little part to play in the universe, and each of us in a certain sense is indispensable; each of us is unique.

And perhaps the thought of our Mother in heaven and her life on earth may help us to emulate her and try to be what she was, the most cooperative of God's creatures that has ever existed. We must always keep in mind the fact that our life, if it has any purpose at all, derives this purpose from God and from the small part we have to play in creation, the purpose for which we have been created and appropriately gifted.

We know little, it is true, about the life of our Lady, but really it is not necessary to know much more. Full of grace from the first instant of her conception, the life of the Virgin Mary is both unique and exemplary. It is true that there is no other model than Jesus Christ, but it is also true that there has never been any other creature who imitated him so faithfully and who so exactly reproduced the image of her Son. And if God did not want to give us the Word directly, but by means of the Virgin, surely the best way to imitate Christ is to imitate our Lady.

Ι

THE ANNUNCIATION

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you!" But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end." And Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no husband?" And the angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And, behold, your kinswoman Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For with God nothing will be impossible." And Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

LUKE 1: 26-38

The fact and its significance

The scene could not be simpler, nor could it be related more simply. A virgin named Mary was in her house in Nazareth.