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# Mary and the signs of the times

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## **Mary teaches how to interpret the course of history...**

The title of this section allows us to appreciate two realities:

1. the profound continuity between the Prophets in the Bible and the “Beautiful Lady of La Salette”, and
2. the strong biblical foundation of a genuine La Salette spirituality.

It is no coincidence that the late Cardinal of Milan, Carlo Maria Martini S.J., maintained that among the major Marian apparitions, the Apparition of La Salette is the one that best reveals features and characteristics which are typically biblical.

In order to illustrate this continuity, I would like to approach the apparition of Our Lady of La Salette from the ‘prophetic’ model developed by the Jewish philosopher and theologian Abraham Joshua Heschel. When we interpret the apparition of the “Beautiful Lady” at La Salette based on the book by Joshua A. Heschel, *The Prophets*, we can observe the following points.

**First:** like the Prophets in the Bible, “the Beautiful Lady” calls to conversion. Mary’s words which open the message, as well as her admonitions introduced by words “If my people will not submit [...]” and “If they are converted [...]”, resonate with us as an invitation to return to the Lord. In the Bible, conversion does not only mean to stop doing evil in order to embrace the good, but also to turn more towards the Lord. According to this meaning, conversion, rather than being a single act, is configured as a gradual process of transformation that aims to conform us to the Son, to live as He lived, to make his choices our own.

**Second:** the various references to the concrete historical situation contained in the message emphasize Mary’s “prophetic” presence at La Salette. Like the Prophets in the Bible, “The Beautiful Lady of La Salette” embodies a spirituality deeply rooted in history, but with her gaze turned to the heavens. Within the historical context, the words of the “Beautiful Lady”, like those of the Prophets in the Bible, are a heartfelt appeal that aims to change, from within, the lives of the people she is addressing and history itself. Such a change is possible through ‘just’ relationships between us and the Lord, us and creation, and each other. At La Salette, the

“Beautiful Lady” reminds us that the connection between human responsibility, justice and history is so strong as to determine success as much as failure, both social and individual.

**Third:** like the Prophets in the Bible, Mary, at La Salette, teaches us to interpret the course of history with the eyes of faith; she teaches us to *intus-legere*, in history, the voice of God; she teaches us to discern what leads to the Lord and what distances us from Him.

**Fourth:** like the Prophets in the Bible, Mary, at La Salette, became the voice of a God who, as Joshua A. Heschel liked to say, is in search of man, of each one of us. At La Salette, Mary awakens in us this awareness that God is a pilgrim God, engaged in a “divine exodus” because he is in search of his children.

**Fifth:** like the Prophets in the Bible, “the Beautiful Lady of La Salette” appears not to convey to us abstract truths about God or to give us religious norms to follow carefully, but rather to remind us, through her tears, that the God of the Bible is a “pathetic” God, filled with pathos, in the primitive sense of the Greek root of the term meaning ‘emotion’, ‘sentiment’, ‘passion’, or ‘suffering’. God suffers for us. The Son suffered for us. And the “Beautiful Lady of La Salette” suffers for her children. This is another trait that characterizes the Prophets in the Bible: in fact, the entire biblical prophecy is a constant cry that God is not indifferent to evil.

The words of Mary at La Salette, like the words of the Prophets of Ancient Israel, do not predict any future. Rather, they are words that show how God works within our history, and what our role and responsibility is in this divine-human interaction.

### **All of creation cries out for reconciliation...**

#### **“If the harvest is spoilt, it is all on your account”**

The Son of God came into the world to ‘restore’ man’s image and likeness to God. It is to this creature that the Creator entrusted the dominion over the world, more precisely to “guide the earth”. However, man often disregards the responsibility he has been given by his Creator. And when he oversteps the limits he attracts misfortune to himself and to the universe.

The message of Our Lady at La Salette reveals precisely the discrepancy between nature and man whenever he does not work in harmony with God. The spoiling of the harvest is perceived as God's punishment because man wants to be self-sufficient. We all know that a Godless humanism leads to incalculable disasters.

In the message of La Salette, regarded by St. John Paul II as “the heart of Mary's prophecies”, the denunciation of the deplorable moral state of the world embodied in religious indifference emerges first and foremost. Indeed, the situation had deteriorated to the point that Our Lady

threatened to let fall her Son's arm. About La Salette and its prophetic signs, John Paul II also said: *"Mary, a Mother filled with love, manifested her sadness in the face of the moral evil of humanity. Her tears help us better understand the painful gravity of sin, the denial of God, as well as the passionate fidelity that her Son, the Redeemer, maintains toward her children despite a love wounded and rejected"*.

The message of La Salette is relevant in this world that seems to repeat again and again the mistakes that Mary came to correct through the message that she conveyed to Maximin and Melanie. Submission to Christ, penance and a prayerful life are the fundamental ingredients that the Beautiful Lady presents to us so that we may be reconciled with God.

This prophetic quality of the apparition at La Salette is revealed in the signs she herself bears, the symbol of the great message of the Virgin of La Salette: the cross in the center, the hammer on the left and the pincers on the right. While the hammer symbolizes the sins of humanity that nail the crucified Jesus, the pincers symbolize prayer and conversion.

Our mission as ambassadors of Christ leads us to take on the responsibility that Mary has entrusted to the sighted, to go to all people, that is, to remind people of their duty to let themselves be guided by the one master, Jesus Christ. When this happens, when people heed the call to conversion, **"the stones and rocks will change into mounds of wheat"**. Mary is clear in awakening in us the deep root of the evils that the world suffers and can suffer if change, submission to Christ do not come from man. Mary invites us to return to God through Christ, whose kingship seeks to restore the righteousness of souls everywhere.

### **Mary is the sign of the new covenant...**

It is very difficult to accept the words Mary pronounces in her Message: "If the harvest is spoilt, it is all on your account". But they express the truth about the fact that evil does not come from God, but from his creatures. At first it was Lucifer and his followers who perpetrated it, then - the first men who had been deceived. Our mismanagement of the world leads to its corruption. Mary's words not only contain a prophecy or a judgment about the current situation, but they remind each one of us where evil comes from. She who cannot be accused of any act of disobedience to God's will says so. Her "Fiat" was and is present in every thought, in every word and in every action, without exception.

God's first commandment to Adam and Eve, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen 1:28), has never been revoked. But after the original sin the situation deteriorated, and it will continue to do so until the end of the world. We are responsible for

everything that goes wrong around us, for we are deceived by Satan, whose disobedience to God generates the incessant pitfalls and temptations that beset us. All events that occur in the history of each of us are signs of the times.

If we follow Mary's warning, which reminds us that - paraphrasing - we do not have complete dominion over the earth and something is always bound to go wrong, then we will cease to blame God and the world for all the evil that befalls us. We must confirm our correct reading of the signs of the times, first of all, by showing our gratitude and blessing God for the life He has given to each of us and for the vocation to eternal life in Heaven; moreover, we must be grateful to God that, despite our disobedience and disloyalty, the merciful Lord grants us grace and helps us to put order in the midst of the confusion that we ourselves have created. Within this context, the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, Son of God, appears to be a necessary remedy and helps us to rise up in the humble and persevering effort to bring good to this world, which also suffers for the damage it has endured.

All the evil that strikes us is a permanent sign that we have let ourselves be led by Satan to believe that we can criticize and judge God, accusing him of badly managing the world that He himself created. God has never revoked his decision to entrust the Earth to man. Responsibility for everything that happens here lies solely with humankind, with all men and women. Each one is responsible for it before God.

Therefore we can say that there is practically only one permanent sign, evoked by Mary - the sign that She at La Salette indicates precisely as the spoilt harvest. It is revealed by the word of God addressed to Adam before his banishment from Eden:

“Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat from it’. Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return” (Gen 3:17-19).

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