

The “Swansong”¹

Last talk of the Retreat Course for Priests 1941, named
“The Marian Priest”

I shall now sing you my swansong, the last hymn I will be able to sing in praise of the Mother of God. Think of the well-known example of a man who was about to undergo a serious operation on his tongue. He wanted his last words to be: Praised be Jesus Christ! I want to do the same. And if it should turn out that this is not my swansong, I want to say that my last hymn will have to be in praise of Mary. Every time we praise Mary, we praise God and Christ.

There is not just one sign that we look upon as a symbol of Christianity, there is not just the sign of the cross, there is also the sign of Mary.

I want to express all that I have experienced here over the years in the one title: *Mother Thrice Admirable of Schoenstatt!* In very truth those are the best loved words, the most important words, the most powerful words.

The *best loved* words: All that we have become, and all that has developed through us, has come into existence through the Blessed Mother. When we say the word MTA, everything resounds.

When we see the intimate union between Christ and Mary, we have to say: the dearest word is MTA.

It embodies everything. I feel that we have now come to a certain conclusion and stand at the start of something new. All through the MTA!

A best loved words, because when I look back I have to say that our field would be better tended if we had been more faithful to our Lady than we were, if we had not disturbed God’s work with our human cleverness. That is why the best loved words must also be words of reparation. This reparation will go even deeper when we think how strong our faith in our mission was and is. “You, Bethlehem, are by no means the least ...” We heard similar words. How much more blessing would have gone out from here if we had been more faithful to our MTA and our mission!

We have to take the most loved words into the coming time. *Procedamus in pace – in nomine Domini et Dominae. Amen.* As a heading over the time to come we write MTA.

However, these words are also the *most important* words. We want to save a fervent devotion to Mary within the whole structure of the Catholic Church. Christ and Mary belong together. To start with, Christ is the stem, the root. But, from a certain point of

¹ The term goes back to a Greek myth telling that a swan knows to sing a most beautiful song just before it dies. The term is predominantly applied to a composer’s last composition, but also to any last message before someone dies.

view, our Lady is the root, the foundation, on which the whole structure of Christianity rests. All this resonates in the hymn MTA.

Finally, they are also the *most powerful* words. The Mother of God, the great help-mate [of Christ], was allowed to hang spiritually with him on the cross. She gave the blood of her soul. MTA is for us the woman who battled, but also shared in his suffering. She is the great helper in our Lord's work, which reached its climax on the cross. I, too, can help him, I want to shirk nothing. When I say MTA, all this has to resonate.

So what may I say in detail at the dividing point between two epochs? "*Ecce mater tua.*" When our Lord was about to leave the world, he gave us his ultimate gift. That is how we should see it. So let us take it with us into the coming times. Leo XIII did something similar. He also made our Lord's last will and testament his own. His swansong was: "*Ecce mater tua!*" The two – the Church and Mary – depend on each other. The Church has to carry out its duty as a child. So those words must also apply to us: From that hour the disciple took her to his home (Jn 19, 37). Our oath of loyalty has to stand for all eternity:

This is the banner I have chosen:
I will never abandon it, I swear this to Mary!

Her answer will be:

This is the instrument I have chosen:
I will never abandon it, I swear this to God!

These words apply not only to the individual, but also to the whole Family. Our answer – the answer every one of us gives – has to be: *Ave Imperatrix, morituri te salutant!* – Hail, Sovereign Lady, those who are about to die salute you! That has to be the conclusion of these days of retreat.

In these days we have constantly looked at our Lady. We now want to look at her more closely in the way she is humanly close to us as the face of Christ and the Triune God turned towards us. If we remain true to our Lady, we know that with her we can live a good, that is, religious life as a priest. Together with her we can battle heroically, with her we can die gloriously. Let us examine the individual statements.

Is it easy to live with the Blessed Mother? I see her as **my home, my fortress and my constantly flowing source of joy.**

My home. Just as Jacob saw the ladder reaching to heaven and said, "This is the house of the Lord", so we see our Lady as a ladder reaching to heaven and the house of the Lord. St Bernard called her a home, which the Lord had prepared for himself. That is why I respect her so highly. But she is also my home, and for this reason I am filled with childlike gratitude.

It is a **magnificent** home. The Lord has built himself a house resting on seven pillars. We know that Solomon built himself a palace and another for his wife, which were worked with gold from top to bottom. Here is more than Solomon! Hasn't Christ in fact built himself a home more magnificent than that of Solomon? Think of the Immaculate Conception, the sinlessness of the Blessed Mother, her fullness of grace, and her glories in heaven.

This dwelling, this home, also belongs **to us**. He did so for two reasons – because the Lord himself predestined her for us, and because the Blessed Mother offered herself to us. The Lord himself predestined her: She was meant to be the Mother of mercy. He calls out to us “*Ecce Mater tua*”. With these words the Lord personally gave the heart of his Mother to us to be our home. Even if my ordinary home is as poor as can be, I nevertheless live in a palace. Think of all God did so that this home could be a warm home for us. He saw to it that this heart had to experience all the suffering a human heart can bear.

It is a **safe** home, because God himself built it. She is the Tower of David hung all about with many shields and surrounded by a defensive wall. Whoever lives there is safe.

It is also a **tried and tested** home. Think of all the people who have already found protection in her. Think of how many have matured to become heroic, strong personalities. In this home we want to learn to obey God's wishes and plans lovingly; we want to learn to be tenderly conscientious, asking all the time only, “Lord, what do you want me to do?” (Acts 9, 6). Then we will never sell our right as firstborn for a mess of pottage. That is the beat of our Mother's heart. *Ecce Ancilla Domini, fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum*. In the storms of time we have to stand like the Blessed Mother, reaching upwards, thinking only one thought: God's wish and will above everything! Even if it cost us our lives! How often have we not offered and given our Blank Cheque! In this home, in Mary's heart, we now learn to live it and apply it in life. So, *Ecce mater tua!* – Look, there is your dwelling in which you have to live and find a home.

Our Lady is also the *Tower of David, terribilis ut castrorum acies ordinata* (cf. Cant 4, 4). To belong to her means becoming part of the army she is leading. She is the Woman who crushes the serpent, and those who give themselves to her will also be used for the great task of crushing the serpent's head. However, we also know that we will always be victorious if we fight under this banner. “*Ipasa conteret caput tuum*” (Gen 3, 15). This was the promise at the beginning. Our means of battle is our undivided self-surrender to Christ, the Crucified. We want to be victorious by carrying the cross. How can we describe our cross? One thing is certain, it will be a cross that God has fashioned for us.

Our Lady will be and remain the *source of our joy*. That is why we intone the “*Laetatus sum ...*” and the *Magnificat*. A plant cannot exist without the sun, so a human heart cannot exist and flourish without joy. As long as I am at our Lady's side,

as long as I live in her heart and co-operate in doing her work, she will be a constantly flowing source of joy for me.

So what do we want to give her? "*Morituri te salutant*", we call out to her. Are we ready to die? For a long time already we have been consecrated oblations. Is not everyone a consecrated oblation through baptism, through the sacraments? We again want to profess our readiness to be consecrated oblations. But don't we also want to confirm this consecration? Or should we wait until the last moment? More than every before we have to die to ourselves and live the spirit of the vows and Blank Cheque. We consciously want to affirm our readiness: We want to accept gladly whatever God has prepared for us. Yes, we want to reach out to say "*Sitio*" – I thirst – and "*Deo gratias*" – thanks be to God. After all, it is this complete detachment from ourselves that makes us as light as feathers. Let us not forget that nothing can happen to us that has not been foreseen by God.

St Brigid once saw our Lady stretching her arms round the whole world. As she did so her heart glowed very warmly. Yes, our Lady will look after us, even if what she has prepared for us may be outwardly hard. We want to be prepared to die.

Now, however, we have to strive seriously in everyday life. Let us not play around with words, but prove by our deeds that we belong completely to her, that we have died to ourselves and the world. We have to practice dying by being disciplined. We don't have much time for arguments. Today we have to act. How much time we lose otherwise!

And if God wants me to bear the outward marks of death – a work to which I have committed my life may cost my life's blood. And if we lose everything, we need to feel that we are strangers on this earth in order to be completely at home in God.

One saying as my testament: Let us remain true to the Blessed Mother! And, my only worry is that we worry too much!

Think of the wonderful example of the Knight of Buchen, a member of the German Order of Knights, who held his ground and held up the ranks of his enemies until he had completed saying the Hail Mary. Then he was fatally wounded and collapsed. So let us hold our ground. As the followers of our Lady let us remain courageous and firm, and enter bravely into the battle. Let us allow her words to resound constantly in our ears:

This is the instrument I have chosen;
I will never abandon it, I swear it to God!