



The Holy See

FIRST VESPERS ON THE SOLEMNITY OF MARY, MOTHER OF GOD AND TE DEUM IN THANKSGIVING FOR THE PAST YEAR

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

Vatican Basilica

Monday, 31 December 2018

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At the end of another year, the word of God accompanies us with two verses from the Apostle Paul (cf. *Gal* 4:4-5). They are concise yet full of meaning: a synthesis of the New Testament that sheds light on a “critical” moment like this, the passage from one year to the next.

The first words that strike us are “the fullness of time”. This expresses a particular nuance in the final hours of this calendar year, in which we still feel the need of something meaningful to fill the passage of time. Something, or better, someone. That “someone” has come. God sent him, “his Son”, Jesus, whose birth we have just celebrated. He was born of a woman, the Virgin Mary; born under the law, a Jewish child, subject to the Lord’s law. Yet how is this possible? How can this be the sign that the fullness of time has come? At his birth, the Child is for all purposes invisible and insignificant, yet in a little more than thirty years, he will release an unprecedented power, one that remains today and will endure for all time. That power is called Love. It is love that gives fullness to everything, even to time. Jesus is the “quintessence” of all God’s love in one human being.

Saint Paul clearly tells us *why* the Son of God was born in time, as well as the mission that the Father gave him: he was born “to redeem”. This is the second word that strikes us: *to redeem*, to ransom, is to emancipate from slavery and to restore to liberty: to the dignity and freedom proper to *sons and daughters*. The slavery to which the Apostle refers is that of the “Law”, understood as a series of commands to be obeyed, a Law that, while indeed pedagogical and instructive, does

not free us from our state of sin. Indeed, it “nails” us to that state, preventing us from attaining the freedom of children.

God the Father sent his only begotten Son into the world in order to eradicate from the heart of men and women the ancient slavery of sin and thus restore to them their dignity. From the heart, as the Gospel teaches us (cf. *Mk 7:21-23*), come all evil intentions, the iniquities that corrupt life and relationships. And here we must pause to reflect with sadness and remorse because, also during this year which is coming to a close, so many men and women have experienced and are experiencing conditions of slavery, not worthy of human persons.

Here too in our city of Rome there are brothers and sisters who, for various reasons, find themselves in this situation. I think especially of so many people who are homeless. There are over ten thousand of them. In the winter months, their situation is especially difficult. All of them are sons and daughters of God, but various forms of slavery, sometimes quite complex, have forced them to live at the limits of human dignity. Jesus himself was born in a similar situation, though not by chance or accident. He desired to be born this way, in order to reveal the love of God for the weak and the poor, and thus to sow in the world the seeds of God’s kingdom, a kingdom of justice, love and peace, where no one is a slave, but all are brothers and sisters, children of the one Father.

The Church in Rome does not want to be indifferent to the forms of slavery today, nor simply observe them and offer assistance, but rather it wants to be *immersed* into this reality, *close* to these people and to these situations.

I like to encourage this form of maternity of the Church as we celebrate the motherhood of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Contemplating this mystery, we recognize that God was “born of a woman” so that we might receive the fullness of our humanity, “the adoption as children”. By his abasement we have been saved. From his smallness has come our greatness. From his fragility, our strength. From making himself a servant, our freedom.

What name shall we give this, if not *Love*? The love of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, to which Holy Mother Church raises worldwide her hymn of praise and thanksgiving.