



# The Holy See

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EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION  
AT THE CHURCH OF SANTA SUSANNA IN ROME

**HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II**

*Sunday, 27 June 1993*

*"Those who welcome Christ welcome the one who sent him, the Father" (Cf. Mt. 10: 40).*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

1. Let us give expression to *the joy of welcoming Christ*. Let us rejoice in the fact that from apostolic times Rome, the capital of the ancient Empire, accepted Christ. Let us sing our joy that the names of *the Apostles Peter and Paul* are indelibly linked to this City. They came here sent by the Lord. After the Resurrection, Christ said to the Apostles: "As the Father has sent me... receive the Holy Spirit" (Jn. 20: 21-22).

And so we believe it was the Holy Spirit who directed the steps of Peter, the fisherman of Galilee, and of Paul, the scholar from Tarsus, to this City of Rome. Through their apostolic ministry and, at the end, through their martyrdom *they confirmed the words of their Lord and Master*.

Christ said: "Anyone who does not take his Cross and follow in my footsteps is not worthy of me" (Mt. 10: 38). And here in Rome, Peter did take up the cross on which he gave his life. Christ also said: "Anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it" (Ibid. 10: 39). And so *Paul – like Peter – here in Rome, lost his life for the sake of Christ. Sanguis martyrum semen Christianorum* (Cf. Tertullian, *Apologeticus*, 50) – the Church grew strong out of the martyrs' example. Thus the words of Christ were fulfilled in the Apostles: "Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me; and those who welcome me welcome the one who sent me" (Mt. 10: 40). All this happened here in Rome.

2. *Five hundred years have passed* since the inhabitants of the Old World discovered the New

World. In discovering that continent they opened up a whole new area of mission and apostolate. The evangelization of America spread gradually from one region to another of that great Continent: to the center, the south, the north. *Christ's command to preach the Gospel to the ends of the earth was being fulfilled.* The inheritance of Peter and Paul lived on in the Church on that New Continent, and eventually a part of it came back from there to Rome, back to the tombs of the Apostles.

*The American community of Santa Susanna, which I have the joy of visiting today, is, as it were, a living symbol of the oneness of the faith in the diversity of Christ's followers.*

Wishing to provide better pastoral care for American residents and pilgrims in Rome, Pope Benedict XV designated the Church of Santa Susanna as the American National Church on January 10, 1922, entrusting this apostolate to the Paulist Fathers. I greet with affection Father Joseph Gallagher, President of the Paulist Fathers, as well as the Rector, Father John Foley, and the other priests currently serving the community. They are following in the footsteps of the priests who for more than seventy years have made this church a spiritual home for those who are far from their own country. For so many people Santa Susanna has been a place of fellowship and solidarity, a believing community nourished by the Church's sacramental life, a life which shows its vitality in abundant works of faith and service.

3. Un particolare ringraziamento desidero anche rivolgere al *Ministero per i beni culturali* della Repubblica Italiana, qui rappresentato dal direttore generale, prof. Francesco Sisinni, per l'assistenza fornita durante il restauro di questa bella chiesa. Possano tutti coloro che hanno contribuito a tale opera essere ricompensati spiritualmente per la loro generosità (cf. *2 Cor 9, 11*)! Vorrei, altresì, manifestare il mio apprezzamento alle Monache cistercensi, la cui vita consacrata alla preghiera contemplativa e alla penitenza silenziosa assicura spirituale sostegno per l'autentica vita cristiana della comunità. Auspico che questa lieta circostanza porti ad apprezzare sempre più intensamente la profonda comunione che unisce fra loro i "battezzati in Cristo Gesù". A tutte rivolgo un incoraggiamento perché nei vostri rapporti con i residenti in Roma, i visitatori e i pellegrini di lingua inglese, continuiate a manifestare l'universalità e la cattolicità della nostra fede.

4. The ministry of the Paulist Fathers is characterized by their threefold mission of *evangelization, reconciliation and ecumenism*. These three tasks provide a solid framework for the Christian life and mission of the Santa Susanna community. The recently concluded Roman Synod entrusted all the faithful of this "greatest and most ancient Church" (S. Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, III, 3, 3) with the mission of the *new evangelization*. The fact that most of you have your origins in a different country and a different culture does not exclude you from the ecclesial life of this City. Rather, witnessing to the Gospel and the example of true discipleship know no boundaries. A Christian's task is always to bring the light of Christ and the power of his Resurrection (Cf. Phil. 3: 10) to a world thirsty for the waters of divine Truth and Life. Rome, like every other city, is a place where faith and indifference, grace and sin, holiness and human misery exist side by side. Men

and women are thirsting for God, struggling to find the meaning of life, suffering and death (Cf. John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 46) in the heart of the modern metropolis. The American community at Santa Susanna's has its own vital role to play in spreading "the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation" (Eph. 1: 13). The Gospel is ever fresh, ever relevant, ever provocative, ever liberating: "sharper than any two-edged sword" (Hebr. 4: 12). The world around you, in your families, schools, apartments and offices, needs the witness of your fidelity in the face of trials, your steadfast faith and ardent charity, your solidarity with those in need. It is from the Eucharistic Sacrifice that, strengthened by the Bread of Life, you will as individuals and as a community derive the strength needed to pledge yourselves in word and deed to this new evangelization.

5. *Reconciliation*, in all its many forms, is an essential element of Christian life, and *constitutes an important chapter of the new evangelization*. I am thinking especially of the reconciliation of Catholics who for one reason or another do not take a full part in the Church's life. I am aware that the sense of community which you have created here at Santa Susanna has helped numerous people to return to the practice of their faith. At Santa Susanna's you are all ambassadors for Christ. Many people who come to Rome are moved by the history, art and tradition of the City to reconsider the direction their lives have taken. To those who have been alienated from the Church, a living community such as this one offers "the right hand of fellowship" (Gal. 2: 9). Through your witness the Church's mission to reconcile people with God, with themselves and with their neighbors is fulfilled (Cf. John Paul II, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, 8).

6. A commitment to *ecumenism* is also a mark of your community. When Pope Pius IX approved the Paulist Fathers, he entrusted them with addressing misunderstandings about Catholicism in North America. Since then they have continued their efforts to improve mutual understanding among Christians, and have encouraged projects of dialogue and mutual cooperation with members of other Churches and Ecclesial Communities.

It is appropriate therefore that the Santa Susanna community should actively cooperate with the other Churches and Ecclesial Communities of Rome in works of charity and in praying together for Christian unity.

7. "Anyone who welcomes an Apostle welcomes Christ" (Cf. Mt. 10: 40). The Apostles, and in particular Peter and Paul, transmitted the Gospel in the form of an awareness of New Life. This is the New Life which springs from the redeeming death of Christ: "we believe that having died with Christ we shall return to life with him: Christ, as we know, having been raised from the dead will never die again. Death has no more power over him... his life now is life with God; and in that way, we too must consider ourselves to be dead to sin but *alive for God in Christ Jesus*" (Cf. Rom. 6: 8-11).

All of you, the members of the American community of Rome, are counted, even if only for a time, among "God's beloved in Rome" (Ibid. 1: 7). The early Christian writer Tertullian described the

Church in Rome as "a happy church, on which the Apostles poured out their whole doctrine together with their blood; where Peter had a like passion with the Lord; where Paul was crowned with the death of John" (Tertullian, *De praescriptione haereticorum*, 31). I pray that the community of Santa Susanna will continue to strive to ensure that the ancient tradition of sound faith, persevering hope and boundless generosity will mark the life of the Church in the Rome of today no less than in the past. Let us entrust these intentions to Mary, Mother of the Redeemer, that they may bear fruit in abundance (Cf. Jn. 15: 16). To her I commend you and your families, and the whole American community in Rome.

May Almighty God bless your Nation with harmony and peace. Amen.

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