



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT TO STS URBAN AND LAURENCE PARISH IN ROME

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Sunday, 12 December 1999

1. *"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted ... to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour" (Is 61: 1-2).*

These words, spoken by the prophet Isaiah so many centuries ago, sound quite timely to us, today, as we rapidly approach the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. They are words that rekindle hope, prepare souls to receive the Lord's salvation and announce the inauguration of a special time of grace and deliverance.

Advent is a liturgical season that highlights the expectation, the hope and the preparation for the Lord's coming. Today's liturgy invites us to undertake this task by presenting the person and preaching of John the Baptist. As we heard in the Gospel text, he is the one who was sent to prepare men and women for their meeting with the promised Messiah. *"Make straight the way of the Lord"* (Jn 1: 23). The Baptist's invitation is meant for us all; let us accept it! With a joyful heart, let us hasten to the Great Jubilee, to the year of grace in which the whole Church will resound with a great hymn of praise to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

2. Dear brothers and sisters of Sts Urban and Laurence Parish at Prima Porta! The long pilgrimage I began in the first months of my service as Bishop of Rome, and which has enabled me to visit so many parishes of our Diocese, today brings me here to Prima Porta, for the last Pastoral Visit to a parish community of Rome before the opening of the Holy Year. I am pleased to be among you today and I greet you all with affection. I extend a particular greeting to the Cardinal Vicar, to the Auxiliary of this area, Bishop Enzo Dieci, to your zealous parish priest, Fr Fernando Altieri, to the dear Oblate Sons of Our Lady of Divine Love, who are entrusted with the care of this community, and to the priests who assist in the pastoral ministry. I greet the women religious in the parish: the Daughters of St Mary of Leuca, the Handmaids of the Lord and the Daughters of St Vincent. The witness of the consecrated persons working in your parish shows how the consecrated life is a great spiritual and pastoral resource for the community.

I greet the members of the Pastoral Council, those who actively participate in the various parish committees, the leaders and members of the parish groups, the children who attend catechism classes and all the residents of this

neighbourhood. I do not want to forget the young people, the elderly and the sick. An affectionate and fraternal greeting also goes to dear Cardinal Gilberto Agustoni, who has resided for many years in the parish territory and since 1994 has been the Cardinal Deacon of Sts Urban and Laurence Church. I also cordially greet Archbishop emeritus Dino Tralozini of Cosenza-Bisignano.

3. This morning I am at Prima Porta, the area named after the arch next to a recently restored ancient temple dating back to the time of Emperor Augustus, so my thoughts naturally turn to the time when the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.

In recalling the great event of the Incarnation, we cannot fail to think that our God is very close to us; indeed, he entered our history to redeem it from within. Yes! In Jesus of Nazareth, God came to live among us, "to bring good tidings to the afflicted ... to bind up the brokenhearted ... to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour" (*Is* 61: 1-2).

4. Dear parishioners of Sts Urban and Laurence, the cemetery of Prima Porta, which I was able to visit eight years ago on the Solemnity of All Saints, is part of your parish. During our Eucharistic assembly, we will remember in a special way all the faithful who are buried there, entrusting them to the infinite mercy of God. Our thoughts for those who have gone before us in the kingdom of God must always accompany us. The cross which will be erected in the cemetery to recall my visit will be an eloquent reminder of the glorious death of the Lord, the source of the hope of salvation for everyone. May your entire community, made up of about 2,000 families and spread over an area that covers many kilometres along the Flaminia and Tiberina roads, always be guided by the mystery of Christ.

I know that the majority of the population stayed in this area even after the heavy flooding in 1965 and rebuilt their homes with courage and tenacity. I also know that many of the inhabitants are elderly. Often they welcome into their home their married children who have difficulty in finding a home elsewhere. In this way a great and rich family community is created, where grandparents, children and grandchildren live together. I hope that this shared life will foster not only mutual material aid, but also the transmission of those human and Christian values which form the precious heritage of the beloved Italian nation. The elderly are the guardians of our collective memory and the witnesses to a wisdom rooted in Christian values (cf. *Letter to the Elderly*, nn. 9-10).

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say rejoice!

5. Dear brothers and sisters, on this Third Sunday of Advent, the Day for New Churches is celebrated throughout the Diocese of Rome. Through the direct concern of my venerable Predecessor, the Servant of God Pope Paul VI, you have had a new church for many years now.

You can therefore well understand how important it is for a community to have a worship and meeting centre that is open and welcoming to all: to families living in the area for some time, to the newly arrived immigrants from other parts of Italy or from countries outside the European Community, and to all who in any way need to be encouraged to walk the paths of faith.

Let us pray to the Lord that in every area of Rome that still lacks a suitable parish centre, a worthy place of worship may

be built, thanks to everyone's contribution. Let us also pray that every parish will always be, especially during the imminent Jubilee Year, a community able to bear witness to the Gospel, attentive to the problems of the people, open and hospitable.

6. "*Brethren, ... rejoice always*" (1 *Thes* 5: 16). I would like to conclude with this invitation to joy, addressed by St Paul to the Christians of Thessalonica. It characterizes this Sunday, commonly called "Gaudete". It is an exhortation to the joy that resounds from the very first words of the Entrance Antiphon: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice! The Lord is near".

Yes, dear brothers and sisters, we are glad because the Lord is near. In a few days, on Christmas Eve, we will joyfully celebrate the 2,000 years since his birth. May this joy penetrate every aspect of our lives.

Let us ask Mary, she who was the first to hear the angel's invitation: "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you" (*Lk* 1: 28), to sustain us in this programme of Christian life, while never forgetting that every believer's vocation is one of bearing witness to joy.

May Mary, the Mother of Divine Love, be for us all the cause of our true and deep joy. Amen!

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