



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT TO ST RAYMOND NONNATUS PARISH IN ROME

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Sunday, 21 February 2003

1. *"Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil" (cf. Mt 4:1).*

At the beginning of the Lenten season, the liturgy shows us Jesus grappling with the tempter in the wilderness. The Son of God, severely tested by the devil, triumphs over the three basic temptations that beset every human life: concupiscence, exploitation of God and idolatry.

Satan's three deceitful suggestions: "If you are the Son of God ..." contrast with the solemn proclamation of the heavenly Father at the time of the baptism in the Jordan: "This is my beloved Son" (Mt 3:17). They are a test, then, which deeply affects the Saviour's mission. The victory won by Christ at the beginning of his public life foretells his definitive triumph over sin and death which will be achieved in the paschal mystery.

By his Death and Resurrection, Jesus will not only remove the sin of our first parents but will impart to each man and woman the superabundance of God's grace. This is what the Apostle Paul recalls in the second reading we have just heard: "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous" (Rom 5:19).

2. *"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Mt 4:4).*

At the beginning of Lent, an important liturgical season which invites us to conversion, Jesus' words re-echo for each of us. Let us allow "the word that proceeds from the mouth of God" to challenge us and to nourish our spirit, since "man does not live by bread alone". Above all, our hearts need God.

Dear brothers and sisters of St Raymond Nonnatus Parish, I am pleased to be among you today. I cordially greet the Cardinal Vicar, the Vicegerent, your parish priest, Fr Eraclio Contu of the Order of Our Lady of Mercy, the Mercedarians, and all his confrères who share his pastoral responsibility for the parish community. I greet the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception of Ivrea and the residents of their institute. I greet you all, dear parishioners, and everyone living in this neighbourhood. I extend a special greeting to the members of the *équipes* and parish groups, the catechists, the members of the Mercedarian Youth Movement, the young people, the families and all who in various ways are actively involved in the life of the community.

3. Although the territory of your parish is not very large, it is made up of two very different human and social milieus. In fact, the older residences are close to the church, while further off, in the recently urbanized areas, are the newly arrived families who are still tied to their original communities. Perhaps because of their different composition, these two neighbourhoods have some difficulty in communicating and being integrated, with results that are not always positive for complete harmony in liturgical and pastoral activities.

I know that you are working to overcome these difficulties and I urge you to continue to know one another better so that you can grow together. I sincerely hope that you will strengthen the unity of the parish, making it a genuine "family of families". In this regard, the project "New Images of Parish", which you have chosen as your pastoral plan, will be a great help. I am especially pleased with the strong commitment to participation in the *City Mission*. For this reason too, I hope that the spirit and style of the Mission will become a permanent style of apostolic action for your community, as for all the others.

If individuals and families tend to be self-contained and find it difficult to come together in the parish - as sometimes happens in a city like Rome - the parish itself must become "missionary". That is, Christians must feel compelled to take the initiative and to reach out to their brothers and sisters in their homes, in the neighbourhood and in the places where they live and work: wherever it is possible to listen together to the one word of salvation - the Word of God - which is more indispensable than bread for everyone's life.

4. "*Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned*" (*Responsorial Psalm*).

Lent, as we know so well, is an important time of penance and grace. This year it is an even more significant call to repentance and conversion because of the Jubilee of the Year 2000. Conversion, as you know, "includes both a "negative" aspect, that of liberation from sin, and a "positive" aspect, that of choosing good, accepting the ethical values expressed in the natural law, which is confirmed and deepened by the Gospel" (*Tertio millennio adveniente*, n. 50).

Dear friends, let us live Lent in this spirit! Pay special attention to the sacrament of Penance. In the frequent reception of this sacrament, the Christian experiences divine mercy and in turn is able to

forgive and to love. May the approach of the Jubilee reawaken in every believer an active interest in this sacrament; may priests be readily available to administer this indispensable sacrament with care and dedication; may places for the sacramental rite of Penance be increased in the city, with confessors available at different hours of the day, ready to dispense God's inexhaustible mercy in abundance.

5. *"Have mercy on me according to your steadfast love ... wash me thoroughly from my iniquity ... create in me a clean heart ... restore to me the joy of your salvation and uphold me with a willing spirit ... O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall show forth your praise" (Responsorial Psalm).*

The prayer of David, after he was shaken by the words of the prophet Nathan, reverberate in our spirit. It is the psalm "Miserere", frequently used in the liturgy and dear to popular piety. Lent is the appropriate time to make this prayer our own and to awaken in our souls the right dispositions for meeting the God of reconciliation and peace with "a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart".

"Have mercy on me according to your steadfast love": thus as today's liturgy suggests, we will undertake our Lenten journey, O Lord, in the strength of your word, "to overcome the temptations of the Evil One and to arrive at Easter in the joy of the Spirit".

Amen!

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