



The Holy See

JUBILEE PILGRIMAGE
OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO MOUNT SINAI

**MASS IN THE INDOOR STADIUM OF CAIRO
HOMILY OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II**

25 February 2000

1. "Out of Egypt have I called my son" (*Mt 2:15*).

Today's Gospel recalls the flight of the Holy Family into Egypt where they came to seek refuge. "An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, 'Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there till I tell you: for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him'" (*Mt 2:13*). In this way, Christ too, "who became man so that man could receive the divinity" (Saint Athanasius of Alexandria, *Contra Arianos*, 2, 59), wished to retrace the journey which was that of the divine call, the route which his people had taken so that all the members of the people could become sons and daughters in the Son. Joseph "rose and took the child and his mother by night, and departed to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, 'Out of Egypt have I called my son'" (*Mt 2:14-15*). Providence led Jesus along the paths upon which in former times the Israelites had marched to go towards the Promised Land, under the sign of the Paschal lamb, celebrating the Passover. Jesus, the Lamb of God, too was called out of Egypt by the Father to fulfil in Jerusalem the Passover of the new and irrevocable covenant, the definitive Passover, which gives salvation to the world.

2. "Out of Egypt have I called my son" . Thus speaks the Lord, who brought his people out of the condition of slavery (cf. *Ex 20:2*) to establish a covenant with them at Mount Sinai. The Passover feast would always be the remembrance of that liberation. It commemorates this event, which remains present in the memory of the people of God. When the Israelites departed for their long march, under the leadership of Moses, they did not think that their wanderings in the desert would last for forty years until they reached the Promised Land. Moses himself, who had led his people out of Egypt and had guided it throughout this time, did not enter the Promised Land. Before he died, he only contemplated it from the height of Mount Nebo, before handing on responsibility for the people to his successor Joshua.

3. While Christians are celebrating the two-thousandth anniversary of the birth of Jesus, we must make this pilgrimage to the places which saw the beginning and unfolding of the history of salvation, the history of the irrevocable love between God and men, the Lord's presence in time and in human lives. We have come to Egypt, on the path upon which God guided his people, with Moses as their leader, to bring them into the Promised Land. We are setting out, guided by the words of the book of Exodus: leaving our condition of slavery, we are going towards Mount Sinai, where God sealed his covenant with the house of Jacob, through Moses, in whose hands he placed the tables of the Decalogue. How beautiful is this covenant! It shows that God does not stop speaking to man in order to give him life in abundance. It places us in the presence of God and is the expression of his profound love for his people. It invites man to turn to God, to allow himself to be touched by God's love and to fulfil the desire for happiness which he bears within himself. If we accept wholeheartedly the tables of the Ten Commandments, we will live fully by the law which God has placed in our hearts and we will have a share in the salvation which the Covenant made on Mount Sinai between God and his people revealed, and which the Son of God through his work of redemption offer to us.

4. In this land of Egypt, which I have the joy of visiting for the first time, the message of the new Covenant has been transmitted from generation to generation through the venerable Coptic Church, heir to the apostolic preaching and activity of the evangelist Saint Mark who, according to tradition, suffered martyrdom in Alexandria. On this day, let us give fervent thanks to God for the rich history of the Church and for the generous apostolate of its faithful, who down the centuries have been ardent witnesses to the Lord's love, sometimes even to the point of shedding their blood.

With affection I thank His Beatitude Stephanos II Ghattas, Catholic Coptic Patriarch of Alexandria, for his words of welcome; they bear witness to your community's living faith and fidelity to the Church. I cordially greet the Patriarchs and Bishops who are taking part in this liturgy, as well as the priests, religious and all the faithful who have come to accompany me in this stage of my Jubilee pilgrimage. I also extend respectful greetings to the Authorities and all those who have wished to be present for this celebration.

Your presence here around the Successor of Peter is a sign of the unity of the Church of which Christ is the head. May the fraternity among all the Lord's followers, so clearly manifested here, encourage you to continue your efforts to build communities united in love, acting as a leaven of concord and reconciliation! In this way, you will find strength and comfort, especially in moments of difficulty or doubt, to bear ever more ardent witness to Christ in the land of your ancestors. With the Apostle Paul, I give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and I pray for you without ceasing so that you will grow in faith, be steadfast in hope and spread everywhere the love of Christ (cf. *Col* 1:3-5).

5. In this Jubilee year, as we recall that Christ is "the Head of the Body, the Church" (*Col* 1:18), we must seek ever more ardently to make resolute progress on the path of the unity which he willed for his disciples, in a spirit of trust and fraternity. In this way our common witness will give glory to God and be more credible in the eyes of men. I pray to our Heavenly Father that serene and fraternal relations, in charity and good will, will be developed with the Orthodox Coptic Church, which I greet here with respect. Such a climate of dialogue and reconciliation will help to find solutions to the problems which still impede full communion. It will also promote respect for the sensitivities of each community, as well as for their specific way of expressing their faith in Christ and celebrating the sacraments, which the Churches must reciprocally recognize as administered in the name of the same Lord. In celebrating the Passover of the Lord during this pilgrimage, may we re-live the Pentecost experience, when all the disciples – gathered - together with the Mother of God

– received the Holy Spirit who reconciles us with the Lord and is the principle of unity and strength for mission, making of us one body, the image of the world to come!

6. From the beginning, spiritual and intellectual life developed in a remarkable way in the Church in Egypt. Here we may recall the illustrious founders of Christian monasticism: Anthony, Pachomius and Macarius, and so many other Patriarchs, confessors, thinkers and doctors who are the glory of the universal Church. Even today the monasteries are living centres of prayer, study and meditation, in fidelity to the ancient cenobitic and anchoritic traditions of the Coptic Church, reminding us that faithful and prolonged contact with the Lord is the leaven which transforms individuals and society as a whole. Thus life with God causes the light to shine on our human faces and illumines the world with a new brightness, the living flame of love.

By accepting today this spiritual and apostolic enthusiasm handed down to them by their fathers in faith, may the young be attentive to the call of the Lord who invites them to follow him, and may they respond with generosity by committing themselves to him in the priesthood or the active or contemplative consecrated life! By the witness of their lives as men and women totally consecrated to God and their brothers and sisters, based on an intense spiritual experience, may consecrated men and women manifest the Lord's unlimited love for the world!

7. In her commitment to the Egyptian people in the areas of education, health and charitable works, the Church seeks to express this disinterested love which excludes no one. The Church's active presence in the intellectual and moral formation of young people is a long tradition of the Coptic Patriarchate and the Latin Vicariate. Catholic educational institutions wish to contribute to the promotion of the human person, especially of women and the family, by educating young people in essential human, spiritual and moral values, with respect for the conscience of everyone; they also aim at fostering friendly relations with Muslims so that the members of each community may make sincere efforts to understand one another and promote together social justice, moral values, peace, respect and freedom.

All citizens have a duty to play an active part, in a spirit of solidarity, in the building of society, in consolidating peace between communities and in managing the common good in an honest way. In order to do this common work which should bring together all the members of the same nation, it is right that everyone, Christians and Muslims, while respecting different religious views, should place their skills at the service of the nation, at every level of society.

8. Following Moses in his journey of faith, during the Jubilee pilgrimage we are making in these days, we are invited to continue our way to the mountain of the Lord, to put aside our different forms of slavery in order to walk on the Lord's path. "And God, seeing our good decisions and observing that we ascribe to him what we achieve ... will give us in return what is proper to him, the spiritual, divine and heavenly gifts" (Saint Macarius, *Spiritual Homilies*, 26, 20). For each one of us, Horeb, the "mountain of faith", is to become "the place of encounter and of the mutual pact, in a sense therefore 'the mountain of love'" (*Letter Concerning Pilgrimage to the Places Linked to the History of Salvation*, 6). This is where the people committed themselves to live in full accord with the divine will, and where God assured them of his eternal benevolence. This mystery of love is fulfilled in the Passover of the new Covenant, in the gift which the Father makes of his Son for the salvation of all humanity. Let us today renew our acceptance of the divine law as a precious treasure! Like Moses, let us become men and women who intercede before the Lord and pass on to others the law which is a call to true life, which frees us from idols and makes every life infinitely beautiful and infinitely precious! For their part, young

people are impatiently waiting for us to help them to discover the face of God, to show them the path to follow, the path of personal encounter with God and the human acts worthy of our divine filiation, a path which is certainly demanding, but a path of liberation which alone will fulfil their desire for happiness. When we are with God on the mountain of prayer, may we allow ourselves to be penetrated by his light, so that our faces will shine with the glory of God and be an invitation to others to live by this divine beatitude, which is the fullness of life!

“Out of Egypt have I called my son”. May everyone hear the call of the God of the Covenant and discover the joy of being his sons and daughters!

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