



# The Holy See

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## SOLEMNITY OF MARY, MOTHER OF GOD XXXIV WORLD DAY OF PEACE

### *HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II*

*1 January 2001*

1. "[The shepherds] went with haste, and found Mary and Joseph and the babe, lying in a manger" (Lk 2: 16).

Today, the Octave of Christmas, the liturgy urges us, with these words, to walk with new and conscious fervour to Bethlehem *to adore the divine Child*, who is born for us. It invites us to follow in the footsteps of the shepherds who, on entering the grotto, recognize in that tiny human being, "born of woman, born under the law" (Gal 4: 4), the Almighty, who made himself one of us. Beside him, Joseph and Mary are silent witnesses of the miracle of Christmas. This is the mystery which we too contemplate with amazement today: the Lord is born for us. Mary "gave birth to the King of heaven and earth for ever" (cf. *Sedulius*).

We remain in ecstasy before the scene which the Evangelist describes to us. Let us pause, in a special way, to contemplate *the shepherds*. Simple and joyful models of our human searching, especially in the context of the Great Jubilee, they highlight the interior conditions required to meet Jesus.

The disarming tenderness of the Child, the surprising poverty in which he is found and the humble simplicity of Mary and Joseph transform the shepherds' lives: thus they become messengers of salvation, evangelists *ante litteram*. St Luke writes: "the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them" (Lk 2: 20). They left happy and enriched by an event that had changed their lives. In their words is the echo of an inner joy which becomes praise: "they returned, glorifying and praising God".

2. In this Jubilee year, we too *have set out to meet Christ*, the Redeemer of man. In passing through the Holy Door, we have experienced his mysterious presence, through which man was given the possibility of passing from sin to grace, from death to life. The Son of God, who became flesh for us, has made us feel the powerful call to conversion and love.

How many gifts, how many extraordinary occasions the Great Jubilee has offered to believers! In the experience of forgiveness received and given, in the commemoration of the martyrs, in listening to the cry of the world's poor and in the testimonies full of faith passed down to us by our fellow believers of all epochs, we too have glimpsed the saving presence of God in history. We have, as it were, physically felt his love which renews the face of the earth. In a few days this special time of grace will end. Just as he asked the shepherds who hastened to adore him, Christ asks of believers, to whom he has given the joy of meeting him, *a courageous readiness to set out once again* to proclaim his Gospel, old and ever new. He sends them to enliven our human history and culture with his saving message.

3. *"The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God"* (Lk 2: 20). We too are beginning this new year which the Lord has given us encouraged and enriched by the Jubilee grace. May we find comfort in the words of the first reading which renew the Creator's blessing. "The Lord bless you and keep you! The Lord let his face shine upon you, and be gracious to you! The Lord look kindly upon you and give you peace" (Nm 6: 24-25). May the Lord give us his peace, peace which is not the result of human compromises but the surprising effect of his benevolent gaze upon us. This is the peace we pray for today, as we celebrate the 34th *World Day of Peace*.

With great affection I greet the distinguished Ambassadors of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See who are present at this solemn liturgy. I greet in particular dear Archbishop François Xavier Nguyễn Văn Thuân, President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, and, with him, the personnel of the dicastery whose specific task is to show the concern of the Pope and of the Apostolic See for the promotion of a more just and peaceful world. I greet the authorities and all those who have wished to speak at this prayer meeting for peace. Ideally I would like once again to propose to you all this year's Message for the World Day of Peace, in which I treated a particularly timely topic, *"Dialogue between cultures for a civilization of love and peace"*.

4. Today, in this evocative liturgical framework, I renew my heartfelt invitation to every person of good will to *take the privileged path of dialogue with confidence and determination*. Only in this way the specific riches that characterize the history and lives of persons and peoples will not be lost but, on the contrary, will contribute to building a new era of fraternal solidarity. May everyone make an effort to promote an authentic culture of solidarity and justice, closely "connected with the value of peace, the primary objective of every society and of national and international life" (*Message for World Day of Peace*, n. 18).

This is even more necessary in the context of the world today, which has been made complex by the widespread human mobility, global communications and the frequently difficult encounters between different cultures. At the same time, *the urgent need to defend life*, a fundamental good of humanity, should be vigorously reaffirmed, since "it is not possible to invoke peace and despise life" (ibid., n. 19).

We address our prayer to the Lord so that respect for these basic values, the heritage of every culture, will contribute to building the hoped for civilization of love and peace. May Christ, Prince of Peace, whom we contemplate in the poverty of the crib, obtain this for us.

5. *"Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart"* (Lk 2: 19).

Today the Church is celebrating the *Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God*. After presenting her as the One who offers the Child to the shepherds who sought him anxiously, Luke the Evangelist gives us an image of Mary, at the same time simple and majestic. Mary is *the woman of faith*, who made room for God in her heart, in her plans, in her body, in her experience as a wife and mother.

She is the believer who is capable of understanding the unusual event of the Son as the coming of that "fullness of time" (*Gal 4: 4*), in which God, choosing the simple ways of human life, decided to involve himself personally in the work of salvation.

Faith leads the Most Holy Virgin to take unknown and unforeseeable paths, while she continues to keep everything in her heart, that is, in the depths of her spirit, to respond with renewed adherence to God and to his plan of love.

6. Let us address our prayer to her at the beginning of this new year.

Help us too, O Mary, always to rethink our lives with a spirit of faith. Help us to safeguard places for silence and contemplation in the frenzy of our daily lives. Orient us constantly to the needs of true peace, a gift of the Nativity of Christ.

On this first day of 2001, we entrust to you the expectations and hopes of all humanity: "We fly to your patronage, O holy Mother of God. Despise not our petitions in our necessities, but deliver us always from all dangers, O glorious and blessed Virgin!" (From the *Liturgy of the Hours*).

Virgin Mother of God, intercede for us with your Son, so that his face will shine on the path of the new millennium and every person can live in justice and peace!

Amen!