



The Holy See

CLOSING OF THE HOLY DOOR

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE JOHN PAUL II

Solemnity of the Epiphany

Saturday, 6 January 2001

1. *"All the peoples of the earth will adore you, O Lord!"* This acclamation from the Responsorial Psalm expresses very well the meaning of the Solemnity of the Epiphany which we are celebrating today. It also sheds light on today's rite of the closing of the Holy Door. *"All the peoples of the earth will adore you, O Lord!"* This is a vision which speaks to us of the future, it makes us look far ahead. There is an evocation of the ancient messianic prophecy, which will fully come to pass when Christ the Saviour returns in glory at the end of history. However the prophecy has had a first fulfilment, which is both historical and prophetic, when the Wise Men came to Bethlehem, bearing their gifts. Here was the beginning of the manifestation of Christ – his "epiphany" precisely – to those who represented the peoples of the world. This is a prophecy which is being fulfilled by degrees in the course of time, according as the Gospel proclamation penetrates the hearts of people and is planted in every part of the world. Was not the Great Jubilee a kind of *epiphany*? By coming here to Rome or by going on pilgrimage elsewhere in the many Jubilee Churches, countless individuals in a sense set out in the footsteps of the Wise Men in search of Jesus. The Holy Door is simply the symbol of the meeting with him. It is Christ who is the true "Holy Door"; it is he who makes it possible for us to enter the Father's house and who introduces us into the intimacy of the divine life.

2. *"All the peoples of the earth will adore you, O Lord!"* Here especially, in the centre of Catholicism, the impressive flow of pilgrims from all continents have given us this year a vivid image of the journey of the world's peoples towards Christ. All kinds of people came, all with the desire to contemplate the face of Christ and to obtain his mercy. *"Christ yesterday and today / the beginning and the end / Alpha and Omega; / all time belongs to him, / and all the ages; / to him be glory and power / through every age for ever"* (*Liturgy of the Easter Vigil*). Yes, this is the hymn that the Jubilee, in the evocative context of the transition to the new millennium, wished to raise to Christ, Lord of history, two thousand years after his birth. Today this extraordinary year officially closes, but the spiritual gifts poured out during the year remain; the great "year of the Lord's favour", which Christ began in the Synagogue of Nazareth (cf. *Lk* 4:18-19) and which will endure to the end of time, continues. While today we close the Holy Door, a "symbol of Christ", the Heart of Jesus remains more open than ever. He continues to say to a humanity in need of hope and meaning: "Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (*Mt* 11:28). Apart from the numerous celebrations and initiatives which have marked it, the great legacy which the Jubilee leaves us is the living and consoling experience of "meeting Christ".

3. Today, I wish to express the gratitude and praise of the whole Church. For this reason, at the end of this celebration, we shall sing a solemn *Te Deum* of thanksgiving. The Lord has worked marvels for us, he has filled us

with his mercy. Today we must make our own the happiness which filled the Wise Men on their journey to Christ: *"When they saw the star they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy"* (Mt 2:10). Above all, we must imitate them as they place at the Child's feet not only their gifts but also their lives. For the sake of her children and all humanity, the Church has sought in this Jubilee year to be more resolute in fulfilling the role which the star fulfilled in guiding the Wise Men on their journey. The Church lives not for herself, but for Christ. She wants to be the "star", the point of reference which helps people find the path which leads to him. The theology of the Fathers loved to speak of the Church as *mysterium lunae*, in order to emphasize that, like the moon, she shines not with her own light, but reflects Christ, who is her Sun. And I gladly recall that this is how the Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church begins: "Christ is the light of the nations, *lumen gentium!*" And the Council Fathers went on to express their burning desire to "enlighten all people with the light of Christ reflected on the face of the Church" (No. 1). *Mysterium lunae*: the Great Jubilee has enabled the Church to live with special intensity this vocation of hers. It is to Christ that she has pointed in this year of grace, echoing once more the words of Peter: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life!" (Jn 6:68).⁴ *"All the peoples of the earth will adore you, O Lord!"* The universality of the call of the nations to Christ has been made more strikingly evident this year. People of every continent and language have come together in this Square. Countless voices have been raised here in song, as a symphony of praise and a proclamation of brotherhood. Of course I cannot mention at this moment all the many different gatherings that have taken place. But I remember the children who opened the Jubilee with their abounding sense of celebration, and the young people who conquered Rome with their enthusiasm and the earnestness of their witness. I think of the families, who presented a message of faithfulness and communion, so necessary in our world, and of the elderly, the sick and the handicapped, who offered such an eloquent testimony of Christian hope. I think of the Jubilee of those in the world of culture and learning who are daily engaged in the search for truth. The pilgrimage which two thousand years ago led the Wise Men from the East to Bethlehem, in search of the new-born Christ, has been repeated this year by millions and millions of Christ's disciples, who have come here not with "gold, frankincense and myrrh" but bringing their own hearts, rich in faith and in need of mercy.⁵ For this reason the Church rejoices today, exulting in the summons of Isaiah: *"Arise, shine forth, for your light has come... And nations shall come to your light"* (Is 60:1, 3). This sense of joy contains no vain triumphalism. How could we possibly succumb to this temptation, precisely at the end of such an intensely penitential year? The Great Jubilee has offered us an extraordinary opportunity to carry out "the purification of memories", seeking God's forgiveness for the infidelities of the Church's children during these two thousand years. Before Christ crucified we remembered that, in contrast to the overflowing grace which makes the Church "holy", we her children are deeply marked by sin, and cast a shadow upon the face of the Bride of Christ: no self-exaltation therefore but a deep sense of our limitations and weaknesses. Yet we cannot but be filled with joy, with that inner joy to which the Prophet calls us, a joy rich in thanksgiving and praise, because it is based on our awareness of the gifts received and our certainty of Christ's enduring love.⁶ Now it is time to look to the future, and the story of the Wise Men can in a certain way give us our spiritual bearings. First of all, they tell us that when we encounter Christ, we must learn to stop and experience deeply the joy of intimacy with him. *"When they entered the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and bowing down they worshipped him"*: from now on their lives would be for ever given to the Child for whom they had endured the rigours of the journey and the deceitfulness of men. Christianity is born, and continually draws new life, from this contemplation of the glory of God shining on the face of Christ. A face to be contemplated, seeing in his eyes the "features" of the Father and allowing ourselves to be filled with the Spirit's love. The great Jubilee pilgrimage has reminded us of this fundamental Trinitarian aspect of the Christian life: in Christ we also meet the Father and the Spirit. The Trinity is the origin and the fulfilment. From the Trinity all things come, and to the Trinity all things return. And yet, as in the case of the Wise Men, this immersion in contemplation of the mystery does not stop us from

journeying on, indeed it compels us to start out afresh on a new stage of the journey on which we become proclaimers and heralds. *“They returned to their own country by a different way”*. The Wise Men were in a sense the first missionaries. Their encounter with Christ did not keep them in Bethlehem, but made them set out anew on the paths of the world. We need to set out anew from Christ and, in so doing, to set out anew from the Trinity.⁷ This is precisely what is asked of us, dear Brothers and Sisters, as the fruit of the Jubilee which concludes today. In connection with this commitment which awaits us, in a short while I will sign the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, in which I offer some reflections which can help the whole Christian community to “set out” with fresh enthusiasm after the Jubilee event. Of course, it is not a question of organizing, in the short term, other major initiatives. We return to our normal activities, but this is something quite different from taking a rest. Rather, we need to draw from the experience of the Jubilee useful lessons which can give inspiration and effective direction to our new commitment.⁸ I offer these reflections to the particular Churches, as a sort of “legacy” of the Great Jubilee, so that the Churches can incorporate them in their pastoral planning. There is an urgent need first of all to build on the desire to contemplate Jesus Christ which the experience of this year has given us. In the human face of the Son of Mary we recognize the Word made flesh, in the fullness of his divinity and his humanity. The greatest artists – of East and West – have striven to capture the mystery of that Face. But it is the Spirit, the divine “iconographer”, who etches that Face in the hearts of all who contemplate him and love him. We need to “set out anew from Christ”, with the zeal of Pentecost, with renewed enthusiasm. To set out from him above all in a daily commitment to holiness, with an attitude of prayer and of listening to his word. To set out from him in order to testify to his Love by living a Christian life marked by communion, charity, and witness before the world. This is the programme which I suggest in the present Apostolic Letter. It can all be reduced to one word: “Jesus Christ!”. At the very beginning of my Pontificate, and countless times since, I have exclaimed to the sons and daughters of the Church and to the world: “Open wide the doors to Christ”. I wish to do so yet again, at the conclusion of this Jubilee, at the beginning of this new millennium.⁹ *“All the peoples of the earth will adore you, O Lord!”*. This prophecy is already fulfilled in the heavenly Jerusalem, where all the just of the world, and especially so the many witnesses to the faith, are mysteriously gathered in that holy city where the sun is no more, since the Lamb is its sun. There above, angels and saints join their voices in singing the praises of God. The pilgrim Church on earth, in her Liturgy, in her proclamation of the Gospel, in her witness, echoes each day that heavenly song. May the Lord grant that, in the new millennium, the Church will grow ever more in holiness, that she may become in history a true *epiphany* of the merciful and glorious face of Christ the Lord. Amen!