



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT TO THE ROMAN PARISH OF ST ALESSIO

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Sunday, 18 November 2001

1. *"By your perseverance you will save your souls"* Lk 21,19. We have just heard the words that express the spiritual message of the Liturgy of the Thirty-Third Sunday of Ordinary Time.

While we are coming to the close of the liturgical year, the Word of God invites us to recognize that divine Providence governs and directs the last events of history. In the first reading, the prophet Malachi describes the day of the Lord (cf. Mal. 3,19) as the decisive intervention of God, that brings about the defeat of evil and the establishment of justice, by punishing the wicked and rewarding the just. More clearly yet, the words of Jesus, that St Luke reports, take away from our hearts every kind of fear and anguish, opening us to the consoling certainty that the life and history of humanity, despite numerous tragic setbacks, remain firmly in God's hands. The Lord promises salvation to the person who puts his trust in him: *"Not a hair of your head will perish"* (Lk 21,18).

2. *"If anyone will not work, let him not eat"* (II Thes 3,10). In the second reading, St Paul teaches that, to prepare the coming of the Kingdom of God, believers must take seriously their vocation and, in view of deviant interpretations of the Gospel message, the Apostle vigorously recalls the concrete need to be busy working. With an energetic comment, the Apostle singles out for condemnation the inactivity of those who claim that the Day the Lord was close at hand and, as a result, gave way to a spirit of inaction and evasion instead of living and readily witnessing to the Gospel.

He who believes, must not behave like that! But he must work in an ongoing and conscientious way, eagerly awaiting the definitive coming of the Lord. Here is the correct life style of the Lord's disciples, that is brought out in the chant before the Gospel: *"Watch and be on guard, because you do not know on what day the Lord will return"* (cf. Mt 24,42.44).

3. My dear parishioners of St Alessio at the Case Rosse, thank you for your warm welcome. I cordially greet the Cardinal Vicar and the Auxiliary Bishop of the Sector. I greet your active parish priest, Don Giancarlo Casalone, the parochial vicar, those who belong to the parish and those who live in this neighbourhood.

I am happy to celebrate Mass in your new and beautiful parish church. Thanks be to God and to the generous contribution of the Vicariate, of your priests and of many persons of good will, that, after about 20 years, your community now has an adequate parish complex. I am sure that it favours the identity and growth of the community and its apostolic activity in this area. It is important to have a place to come together to pray, to receive the sacraments, and to establish relations of friendship and fraternity. In this way, it is easier to form the children, to meet with young people, to help families and support the elderly. The parish creates the spirit of acceptance and of solidarity which our world needs so much.

4. While we thank the Lord for this church and the whole complex, I beg you, brothers and sisters, to continue to build together your parish community, made up of living stones placed upon the cornerstone which is Christ. You have many groups and associations which make up the parish and which gather here to pray, to be formed at the school of the Gospel, and to receive the Sacraments-especially those of Penance and the Eucharist-and to grow in communion and service. Among others, I mention the Scouts, various youth groups, those of Charismatic Renewal, the *Lectio Divina*, and the persons who run the listening centre, *Caritas*. Dearly beloved, walk together and make your generous contribution to the permanent diocesan mission. Oppose negative messages, set out by certain cultural movements of present day society, and be builders of hope and bear Christ everywhere.

Isn't this the pastoral programme of our diocese? In order that the Spirit of Christ may penetrate everywhere, you have to dedicate yourselves again to an organic and ongoing pastoral work for recruiting vocations. You must educate family and youth to prayer and to making their lives a gift to others. For such activity on behalf of vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life, you can benefit from contact with the diocesan Seminaries, from the involvement of religious Institutes, and the support of the services offered by the Vicariate for the apostolate with youth, with university students, and with the family.

5. Everyday you should ask: Lord, what do you wish me to do? What is your will for us as family, as parents and as children. What do you expect from me as a young person who is open to life and wants to live with and for you? Only in answering such personal questions will you fully realize the will of God: to be the "*light*" and "*salt*" that enlightens and gives savour to our beloved City.

Jesus exhorts us to be watchful and to be on guard (cf. chant before the Gospel). He calls us to conversion and to constant watchfulness. May our lives be formed by such an exhortation. When our road seems hard and laborious, when fear and anxiety seem to prevail, it is especially then

that the Word of God should be our light and our strong support. In this way faith becomes strong, hope remains alive and the ardour of divine love is intensified.

May Mary be your support and your guide. She is the faithful Virgin who can teach us ever to "rejoice in the service of the Lord", as we prayed at the beginning of Mass and she can obtain for us the grace "to persevere in our dedication to God", the author of every good thing. Thus we shall achieve "a full and lasting happiness". Amen.