



The Holy See

MASS WITH THE COMMUNITIES FROM FOUR ROMAN PARISHES:

St Anselm

St Mary, Star of Evangelization

St Charles Borromeo

St John Baptist de la Salle

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Paul VI Audience Hall

Saturday, 28 February 2004

1. *“Jesus... was led by the Spirit for forty days in the wilderness, to be tempted by the devil”* (Lk 4:1-2). The account of the 40 days that Jesus spent in the desert at the beginning of his public ministry helps us to understand better the value of the “strong season” of Lent that has just begun.

As we journey through Lent, let us look at Christ who fasts and struggles with the devil. Indeed, in preparing for Easter, we too are “led” by the Holy Spirit into the desert of prayer and penance, to nourish ourselves intensely with the Word of God. We too, like Christ, are called to fight against the devil with all our might and determination. Only in this way, with renewed adherence to God's will, can we be faithful to our Christian vocation: to be heralds and witnesses of the Gospel.

2. I am pleased to welcome you, dear brothers and sisters from the Parishes of St Anselm in Cecchignola, St Charles Borromeo in Fonte Laurentina, St John Baptist de La Salle and St Mary, Star of Evangelization in Torrino.

I am pleased to celebrate the Eucharist with you, continuing in a different way the beautiful custom of my Visits to the parishes of Rome. These meetings enable me to express the affection that binds me to you very intensely, dear faithful of the Diocese of Rome. Never forget it: I have you very much at heart! You are the part of the Christian people especially entrusted to the pastoral

care of the Bishop of Rome.

3. I first greet Cardinal Camillo Ruini, Vicar of Rome, and the Auxiliary Bishop of the Southern Sector. I greet the parish priests: Fr Mario Sanfilippo, Fr Fernando Altieri, Fr Ilija Perleta and Fr Francesco De Franco, and I thank them for describing to me at our meetings prior to this occasion the different situations in their parishes. I greet the Priests and Deacons who assist them, as well as the Franciscan Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, precious collaborators in St John Baptist de La Salle Parish.

I address a cordial thought to the members of the Parish Pastoral and Administrative Councils, to the catechists, the *Caritas* groups, the altar servers and all the members of the various groups active in your communities. A special thought goes to the cantors who have formed a splendid interparochial choir for today's event and are enthusiastically enlivening our liturgical gathering.

4. Dear brothers and sisters, the neighbourhoods in which your Parishes are located are constantly expanding and it is mainly young families who live in them. Offer them an open and cordial welcome; foster their reciprocal knowledge, so that the communities may become increasingly "families of families" that can share their joys and difficulties together.

Involve parents in the preparation of children and young people for the sacraments and for Christian life, keeping in mind family schedules and needs; offer to organize prayer meetings and formation in their apartment block or in their own homes. Remember that families really are the first place for the Christian education of children.

Guide with tender concern those families in difficulty or in precarious conditions, helping them to understand and carry out God's authentic plan for marriage and the family.

5. Dear friends, I know that at present you have to make do with temporary structures for liturgical life and pastoral service. I hope that you will soon be able to use proper premises! In the meantime, however, be concerned to make your parishes genuine spiritual buildings that stand on the corner stone that is Christ! Christ and always Christ!

The Apostle Paul reminds us in this regard: "*If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved*" (Rom 10:9). This is the core of the faith you are each called to proclaim with your life: Jesus who died and rose for us! Refer to this fundamental truth for your spiritual growth that must be constant, and for your apostolic mission.

May Mary, Mother of the Redeemer, a privileged witness of the passion of her Son who shared in his suffering, help you to know him and serve him with generous enthusiasm. May she accompany you on your Lenten Journey, so that with her you may savour the joy of Easter. Amen!

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