



# The Holy See

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## **MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II FOR LENT 2000**

*I am with you always, to the close of the age (Mt 28:20)*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*1. This year, the celebration of Lent, a time of conversion and reconciliation, takes on a particular character, occurring as it does during the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. The time of Lent is in fact the culminating point of the journey of conversion and reconciliation which the Jubilee, the year of the Lord's favour, offers to all the faithful, so that they can renew their fidelity to Christ and proclaim his mystery of salvation with renewed ardour in the new millennium. Lent helps Christians to enter more deeply into this "mystery hidden for ages" (*Eph 3:9*): it leads them to come face to face with the word of the living God and urges them to give up their own selfishness in order to receive the saving activity of the Holy Spirit.<sup>2</sup> We were dead through sin (cf. *Eph 2:5*): this is how Saint Paul describes the situation of man without Christ. This is why the Son of God wished to unite himself to human nature, ransoming it from the slavery of sin and death. This is a slavery which man experiences every day, as he perceives its deep roots in his own heart (cf. *Mt 7:11*). Sometimes it shows itself in dramatic and unusual ways, as happened in the course of the great tragedies of the twentieth century, which deeply marked the lives of countless communities and individuals, the victims of cruel violence. Forced deportations, the systematic elimination of peoples, contempt for the fundamental rights of the person: these are the tragedies which even today humiliate humanity. In daily life too we see all sorts of forms of fraud, hatred, the destruction of others, and lies of which man is both the victim and source. Humanity is marked by sin. Its tragic condition reminds us of the cry of alarm uttered by the Apostle to the nations: "None is righteous, no, not one" (*Rom 3:10*; cf. *Ps 14:3*).<sup>3</sup> In the face of the darkness of sin and man's incapacity to free himself on his own, there appears in all its splendour the saving work of Christ: "God appointed him as a sacrifice for reconciliation, through faith, by the shedding of his blood, and so showed his justness" (*Rom 3:25*). Christ is the Lamb who has taken upon himself the sin of the world (cf. *Jn 1:29*). He shared in human life "unto death, even death on a cross" (*Phil 2:8*), to ransom mankind from the slavery of evil and restore humanity to its original dignity as children of God. This is the paschal mystery in which we are reborn. Here, as the Easter Sequence says, "Death with life contended, combat strangely ended". The Fathers of the Church affirm that in Christ Jesus, the devil attacks the whole of humanity and ensnares it in death, from which however it is freed through the victorious power of the Resurrection. In the Risen Lord death's power is broken and mankind is enabled, through faith, to enter into communion with God. To those who believe, God's very life is given, through the action of the Holy Spirit, the "first gift to those who believe" (*Eucharistic Prayer IV*). Thus the redemption accomplished on the Cross renews the universe and brings about the reconciliation of God and man, and of people with one another.<sup>4</sup> The Jubilee is the time of grace in which we are invited to open ourselves in a particular way

to the mercy of the Father, who in the Son has stooped down to man, and to reconciliation, the great gift of Christ. This year therefore should become, not only for Christians but also for all people of good will, a precious moment for experiencing the renewing power of God's forgiving and reconciling love. God offers his mercy to whoever is willing to accept it, even to the distant and doubtful. The people of our time, tired of mediocrity and false hopes, are thus given an opportunity to set out on the path that leads to fullness of life. In this context, Lent of the Holy Year 2000 is *par excellence* "the acceptable time . . . the day of salvation" (2 Cor 6:2), the particularly favourable opportunity "to be reconciled to God" (2 Cor 5:20). During the Holy Year the Church offers various opportunities for personal and community reconciliation. Each Diocese has designated special places where the faithful can go in order to experience a particular presence of God, by recognizing in his light their own sinfulness, and through the Sacrament of Reconciliation to set out on a new path of life. Particular significance attaches to pilgrimage to the Holy Land and to Rome, which are special places of encounter with God, because of their unique role in the history of salvation. How could we fail to set out, at least spiritually, to the Land which two thousand years ago witnessed the passage of the Lord? There "the Word became flesh" (Jn 1:14) and "increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favour with God and man" (Lk 2:52); there he "went about all the cities and villages . . . preaching the gospel of the Kingdom and healing every disease and every infirmity" (Mt 9:35); there he accomplished the mission entrusted to him by the Father (cf. Jn 19:30) and poured out the Holy Spirit upon the infant Church (cf. Jn 20:22). I too hope, precisely during Lent of the year 2000, to be a pilgrim in the Holy Land, to the places where our faith began, in order to celebrate the two-thousandth Jubilee of the Incarnation. I invite all Christians to accompany me with their prayers, while I myself, on the various stages of the pilgrimage, shall ask for forgiveness and reconciliation for the sons and daughters of the Church and for all humanity.<sup>5</sup> The path of conversion leads to reconciliation with God and to fullness of new life in Christ. A life of faith, hope and love. These three virtues, known as the "theological" virtues because they refer directly to God in his mystery, have been the subject of special study during the three years of preparation for the Great Jubilee. The celebration of the Holy Year now calls every Christian to live and bear witness to these virtues in a fuller and more conscious way. The grace of the Jubilee above all impels us to renew our personal faith. This consists in holding fast to the proclamation of the Paschal Mystery, through which believers recognize that in Christ crucified and risen from the dead they have been given salvation. Day by day they offer him their lives; they accept everything that the Lord wills for them, in the certainty that God loves them. Faith is the "yes" of individuals to God, it is their "Amen". For Jews, Christians and Muslims alike, Abraham is the exemplar of the believer: trusting in the promise, he follows the voice of God calling him to set out on unknown paths. Faith helps us to discover the signs of God's loving presence in creation, in people, in the events of history and above all in the work and message of Christ, as he inspires people to look beyond themselves, beyond appearances, towards that transcendence where the mystery of God's love for every creature is revealed. Through the grace of the Jubilee, the Lord likewise invites us to renew our hope. In fact, time itself is redeemed in Christ and opens up to a prospect of unending joy and full communion with God. For Christians, time is marked by an expectation of the eternal wedding feast, anticipated daily at the Eucharistic table. Looking forward to the eternal banquet "the Spirit and Bride say: 'Come'" (Rev 22:17), nurturing the hope that frees time from mere repetition and gives it its real meaning. Through the virtue of hope, Christians bear witness to the fact that, beyond all evil and beyond every limit, history bears within itself a seed of good which the Lord will cause to germinate in its fullness. They therefore look to the new millennium without fear, and face the challenges and expectations of the future in the confident certainty which is born of faith in the Lord's promise. Through the Jubilee, finally, the Lord asks us to rekindle our charity. The Kingdom which Christ will reveal in its full splendour at the end of time is already present where people live in accordance with God's will. The Church is called to bear witness to the communion, peace and charity which are the Kingdom's distinguishing marks. In this mission, the Christian community

knows that faith without works is dead (cf. *Jas 2:17*). Thus, through charity, Christians make visible God's love for man revealed in Christ, and make manifest Christ's presence in the world "to the close of the age". For Christians, charity is not just a gesture or an ideal but is, so to speak, the prolongation of the presence of Christ who gives himself. During Lent, everyone — rich and poor — is invited to make Christ's love present through generous works of charity. During this Jubilee Year our charity is called in a particular way to manifest Christ's love to our brothers and sisters who lack the necessities of life, who suffer hunger, violence or injustice. This is the way to make the ideals of liberation and fraternity found in the Sacred Scripture a reality, ideals which the Holy Year puts before us once more. The ancient Jewish jubilee, in fact, called for the freeing of slaves, the cancellation of debts, the giving of assistance to the poor. Today, new forms of slavery and more tragic forms of poverty afflict vast numbers of people, especially in the so-called Third World countries. This is a cry of suffering and despair which must be heard and responded to by all those walking the path of the Jubilee. How can we ask for the grace of the Jubilee if we are insensitive to the needs of the poor, if we do not work to ensure that all have what is necessary to lead a decent life? May the millennium which is beginning be a time when, finally, the cry of countless men and women — our brothers and sisters who do not have even the minimum necessary to live — is heard and finds a benevolent response. It is my hope that Christians at every level will become promoters of practical initiatives to ensure an equitable distribution of resources and the promotion of the complete human development of every individual.<sup>6</sup> "I am with you always, to the close of the age." These words of Jesus assure us that in proclaiming and living the Gospel of charity we are not alone. Once again, during this Lent of the year 2000, he invites us to return to the Father, who is waiting for us with open arms to transform us into living and effective signs of his merciful love. To Mary, Mother of all who suffer and Mother of Divine Mercy, we entrust our intentions and our resolutions. May she be the bright star on our journey in the new millennium. With these sentiments I invoke upon everyone the blessings of God, One and Triune, the beginning and the end of all things, to whom we raise "to the close of the age" the hymn of blessing and praise in Christ: "Through him, with him, in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honour is yours, Almighty Father, for ever and ever. Amen." *From Castel Gandolfo, 21 September 1999*

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