



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI TO THE MEMBERS OF THE ITALIAN ARMED FORCES

Friday, 16 December 2005

*Venerable Brothers,
Distinguished Civil and
Military Authorities,
and dear Friends,*

With deep pleasure I have come to meet you at the end of Holy Mass celebrated here in this Basilica, which preserves living memories of the Apostle Peter. We are now approaching the Solemnity of Holy Christmas and this is a particularly favourable opportunity to express fervent good wishes to all of you who represent the Italian Armed Forces. I address an affectionate greeting to each one of you. In particular, I greet your Pastor, Archbishop Angelo Bagnasco, the Military Ordinary [of Italy], whom I thank for his words expressing your common sentiments.

With him I greet the military chaplains, your spiritual directors, who have also wished to accompany you at this moment of intense ecclesial communion. My respectful thoughts then go to the Minister of Defence, the Undersecretaries, the senior Staff members and Commanders-in-Chief, who by joining in this meeting have made it even more important.

The One whom we adore in the Sacrament of the Altar is the Emmanuel, God-with-us, who came into the world for our redemption. In the Christmas Novena that we are beginning precisely today, as we gradually draw close to the Holy Night, the liturgy, increasing in spiritual intensity, makes us repeat: "*Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus!*". This invocation rises from the hearts of believers in all corners of the earth and ceaselessly resounds in every Ecclesial Community.

At Christmas the hoped-for Messiah will come, the One who at the synagogue in Nazareth was to apply to himself the ancient prophetic words: "The Lord... has sent me... to proclaim liberty to captives" (Lk 4: 18). The Redeemer of man will come to set us free and break the shackles of

error, egoism and sin that imprison us. Christ will come to release the human heart with his love. How important it is to prepare ourselves to receive him with humility and sincerity!

The heavenly Father shows his mercy to humanity in the mystery of Christ's Birth. He did not want to leave men and women to themselves and their sin but came to meet their needs, offering them forgiveness that frees them from the oppression of sin with the power of his grace.

Therefore, may these last days of Advent reinforce in each one of us the desire to encounter Christ, the Prince of Peace, the source of our authentic joy.

Every day we experience the precarious and ephemeral quality of earthly life, but, thanks to the Incarnation of the Only-begotten Son of the Father, our gaze always succeeds in understanding God's providential love that gives meaning and value to our entire existence.

The liturgy of this Advent Season impels us to trust, encourages us to entrust ourselves to the One who can fulfil our hearts' expectations. Mary, with her "yes" to the Angel Gabriel, adhered totally to God's will and brought into being the great mystery of the Redemption. May she be the one to accompany us to the meeting with Emmanuel, God-with-us.

With these sentiments, I renew to you my most cordial good wishes for a Holy Christmas, now close, dear members of the Armed Forces, while I willingly impart my Blessing to you all and extend it to the communities you come from and to your families.

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