



The Holy See

FIRST VESPERS ON THE SOLEMNITY OF MARY, MOTHER OF GOD AND TE DEUM IN THANKSGIVING FOR THE PAST YEAR

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

St Peter's Basilica
Sunday, 31 December 2023

[Multimedia]

Faith enables us to live this time in a different way compared to a worldly mentality. Faith in Jesus Christ, God incarnate, born of the Virgin Mary, offers a new way of feeling time and life. I would summarize it in two words: gratitude and hope.

One might say, “But isn’t this what everyone does on the last evening of the year? Everyone gives thanks, everyone hopes, believers and non-believers alike”. Perhaps it may seem that way, and if only it were! But in reality, worldly gratitude, worldly hope are evident: they lack the essential dimension that is the relationship with the Other and with others, with God and with our brethren. They are focused on the self, on its interests, and so they are very short-winded, they do not go beyond satisfaction and optimism.

Instead, in this Liturgy that culminates in the great hymn *Te Deum Laudamus*, one breathes an entirely different atmosphere: one of praise, of wonder, of gratitude. And this happens not because of the majesty of the Basilica, not because of the lights and the hymns — these things are, rather, the consequence — but because of the Mystery that the antiphon of the first Psalm expressed thus: “O admirable exchange: the creator of human-kind, taking on a living body, was worthy to be born of a virgin, and ... has given us his deity in abundance”. This admirable exchange!

The Liturgy allows us to enter into the sentiments of the Church; and the Church, so to speak, learns them from the Virgin Mother.

Let us think of what the gratitude in Mary's heart must have been like as she watched the newborn Jesus. It is an experience that only a mother can have, and yet in her, in the Mother of God, it has a unique, incomparable depth. Mary knows, she alone with Joseph, where the Child comes from. And yet he is there, he breathes, he cries, he needs to eat, to be swaddled, cared for. The Mystery leaves room for gratitude, which flourishes in the contemplation of the gift, of gratuity, whereas it is stifled by the eagerness to have and to appear.

The Church learns gratitude from the Virgin Mother. And she also learns hope. One would think that God chose her, Mary of Nazareth, because he saw his own hope reflected in her heart. The hope that he himself had infused into her with his Spirit. Mary has always been filled with love, filled with grace, and is therefore also filled with trust and hope.

That of Mary and the Church is not optimism. It is something else. It is faith in God who is faithful to his promises (cf. *Lk 1:55*); and this faith takes the form of hope in the dimension of time, we could say "on the move". The Christian, like Mary, is a pilgrim of hope. And this is precisely the theme of the Jubilee of 2025: "Pilgrims of hope".

Dear brothers and sisters, we might ask ourselves: is Rome preparing to become the "city of hope" during the Holy Year? We all know that the organization of the Jubilee has been underway for some time. However, we are well aware that, from our perspective here, it is not principally about this. Rather, it is a question of the witness of the ecclesial and civil community, a witness that, more than events, consists in a life-style and in the ethical and spiritual quality of coexistence. And so the question one might ask is this: are we working, each person in his or her own sphere, so that the city may become a sign of hope for those who live there and those who visit?

An example: entering Saint Peter's Square and seeing people of every nationality, of every culture and religion, move freely and calmly in the embrace of the Colonnade, is an experience that instils hope; but it is important that it be confirmed by a good reception in the visit to the Basilica, as well as by the information services. Another example: the charm of the historic centre of Rome is perennial and universal, but the elderly or those with motor disabilities should also be able to enjoy it; and the "great beauty" should correspond to simple decorum and the normal functioning of places and situations in ordinary, everyday life. Because a city that is more liveable for its citizens is also more welcoming to everyone.

Dear brothers and sisters, a pilgrimage, especially if it is demanding, requires good preparation. Therefore, the coming year, which precedes the Jubilee, will be devoted to prayer. An entire year devoted to prayer. And what better teacher could we have than our Holy Mother? Let us place ourselves in her school: let us learn from her how to live every day, every moment, every occupation with the inner gaze turned towards Jesus. Joys and sufferings, satisfactions and problems. All in the presence of and with the grace of Jesus, the Lord. All with gratitude and hope.

L'Osservatore Romano, Weekly Edition in English, Fifty-sixth year, number 1, Friday, 5 January, 2023, p. 7.

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana