



The Holy See

VISIT TO THE PARISH OF ST JULIE BILLIART IN ROME

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Third Sunday of Advent, 13 December 1998

1. *"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice! The Lord is near"* (Entrance antiphon).

It is from this pressing invitation to rejoice, which characterizes today's liturgy, that the Third Sunday of Advent, traditionally called *"Gaudete" Sunday*, takes its name. This is actually the first word of today's Mass in Latin: "Gaudete", that is, rejoice, be glad because the Lord is near!

The Gospel text helps us to understand the reason for our joy, as it underscores the great mystery of salvation that takes place at Christmas. The Evangelist Matthew speaks to us of Jesus, "he who is to come" (Mt 11:3), who reveals himself as the awaited Messiah through his saving work: *"the blind receive their sight and the lame walk ... the poor have good news preached to them"* (Mt 11:5). He comes to console, to restore serenity and hope to the suffering, to those tired and discouraged in life.

There are still many, even in our day, who are enveloped in the darkness of ignorance and have not received the light of faith; many are lame and have difficulty in walking on the right paths; many are disappointed or discouraged; many are affected by the leprosy of sin and evil and are waiting to be saved. It is to all these that the "good news" of the Gospel, entrusted to the Christian community, is addressed. The Church, on the threshold of the third millennium, vigorously proclaims that Christ is the true liberator of man, the one who leads all humanity back to the paternal and merciful embrace of God.

2. *"Be strong, fear not! Behold your God ... he will come and save you"* (Is 35:4).

Dear brothers and sisters of St Julie Billiard Parish, in greeting you with great affection, I make my own the words of the prophet Isaiah proclaimed a few moments ago: "Be strong, fear not ... your God will come and save you!". These words are the wish I extend to all those God grants me to meet in every part of the world. They summarize what I also wish to

tell you this morning. My presence is meant as an invitation to courage, to perseverance in giving an account of the hope that is in each of you because of faith.

"*Courage!*". Do not be afraid of the difficulties you meet in proclaiming the Gospel. Sustained by the grace of the Lord, do not tire of being apostles of Christ in our city which, even though threatened by the numerous risks of secularization typical of a large metropolis, still has Christian roots and from these it can draw the spiritual nourishment to respond to the challenges of our time. The positive fruits that the City Mission is bearing, for which we thank the Lord, are a strong encouragement to continue the work of the new evangelization without hesitation.

With these sentiments I greet the Cardinal Vicar, the Vicegerent, your parish priest, Fr Adriano Graziani of the Sons of Mary Immaculate (Pavonians) and his brothers who share responsibility with him for guiding the community. My cordial greeting goes also to the members of the pastoral council and to all those belonging to the groups, associations and movements that work in the parish. I would like gratefully to mention the late parish priest, Fr Fortunato Dellandrea, who greatly loved the parish and worked so hard to build this new church where we are today. Together with him, we wish to remember all the deceased of the community, whom we entrust to God's mercy.

3. Your community was founded in 1976, after being broken off from the highly populated parish of St Barnabas the Apostle. It too is entrusted to the pastoral care of the Pavonian Fathers. Populated mainly by people who came in the 1960s from central and southern Italy, the neighbourhood of Torpignattara underwent great expansion until, in the last decade, many young people married and moved away.

Just as in other outlying areas, where suitable places for gathering, instruction and recreation are lacking, here too the parish is the only centre for social activities. For this reason it has been rightly provided with a beautiful new church and facilities for apostolic and community activities.

On this day, dedicated to the collection for the building of new churches, I give thanks to God for the construction of new centres essential for worship on the outskirts of the city. At the same time, I invite all the faithful to collaborate generously in the important ecclesial work known as "*Fifty Churches for Rome 2000*".

Furthermore, here, as in other neighbourhoods, many difficulties are encountered in educating children, adolescents and young people in the faith. I also know that your parish is responding to this challenge with a renewed family ministry. I congratulate you and urge you to carry on this project of supporting families, especially those in difficulty, so that the younger generation may find, precisely within a healthy family environment, help in making mature decisions about their faith and Christian life.

Never tire of welcoming young people and offering them special times for formation, especially when they cannot, unfortunately, count on the support of their families. In these cases, the parish community is called to intervene with the help of persons who are ready to listen to their questions and respond to their existential and religious expectations.

4. "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; he sent me to bring Good News to the poor*". These words of the Gospel acclamation are well suited to the City Mission, which has entered its final phase and in which all Christians are

encouraged to bring the Gospel to the various areas of the city. Last Tuesday, the feast of the Immaculate Conception, the Letter I addressed to them was published. In it I emphasized that "the quality of the workplace depends primarily on individuals. It is their efforts that can make it a vital place for collaboration, communion and relationships marked by respect and mutual esteem, by cooperation and solidarity, and by a witness consistent with the moral values of their own profession. As Scripture recalls: "A brother helped by a brother is like a strong city" (Prov 18:19)" (n. 6).

This morning, as I symbolically entrust my Letter to you and to all the parishes of Rome, I sincerely hope that all Christians will be aware of the urgent need to transmit to others, but especially to young people, those Gospel values that promote the "*civilization of love*".

5. "*Be patient ... until the coming of the Lord*" (Jas 5:7). With the message of joy characteristic of this "Gaudete" Sunday, the liturgy combines the invitation to have patience and to wait vigilantly for the coming of the Saviour, who is now close at hand.

In this regard we must know how to accept and face difficulties and adversity with a glad heart, while patiently waiting for the Saviour who comes. Eloquent is the example of the farmer that the Letter of St James offers us. He "*waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient over it until it receives the early and the late rain*". "*You also be patient*", the Apostle continues, "*establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand*" (Jas 5:7-8).

Let us open our spirit to this invitation; let us go forward with joy towards the mystery of Christmas. May Mary, who silently and prayerfully awaited the Redeemer's birth, help us to make our hearts a dwelling place to receive him worthily.

Amen!

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