



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT TO THE PARISH OF OUR LADY OF THE ROSARY OF POMPEI IN ROME

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Sunday, 8 November 1998

1. *“God is not God of the dead, but of the living; for all live to him” (Lk 20:38).*

One week after the feast of All Saints and the commemoration of All Souls, this Sunday’s liturgy invites us once again to reflect on the *mystery of the resurrection of the dead*. This Christian proclamation is not a generic answer to man’s aspiration for life without end; on the contrary, it is the announcement of a sure hope, because it is based, as the Gospel reminds us, on the very fidelity of God. He in fact is the “God of the living” and communicates to all those who trust in him that divine life which he possesses in full. He, who is the “living One”, is the source of life.

Already in the Old Testament hope in the resurrection of the dead was gradually maturing. We heard an eloquent witness to this in the first reading, which gives an account of the martyrdom of the seven brothers at the time of the persecution unleashed by King Antiochus Epiphanes against the Maccabees and all those who opposed the introduction of pagan customs and cults among the Jewish people.

These seven brothers faced suffering and martyrdom, sustained by the exhortation of their heroic mother and by their faith in the divine reward reserved for the just. As one of them near death said: “One cannot but choose to die at the hands of men and to cherish the hope that God gives of being raised again by him” (2 Mc 7:14).

2. These words that resound in our assembly today call to mind the example of other martyrs of the faith who, not far from this place, offered their life for the cause of Christ. I am thinking of the young brothers, Simplicius and Faustinus, put to death during the persecution of Diocletian, and their sister Viatrix (Beatrice), who also died a martyr. Their bodies are buried, as is well known, in the nearby catacombs of Generosa, so very dear to you.

The courageous witness of these young martyrs, still remembered and celebrated today as the Holy Martyrs of

Portuense, should be a pressing invitation to your community to proclaim with firmness and perseverance the death and resurrection of Christ always and everywhere.

May their example give new dynamism to your apostolate, especially during this pastoral year when the City Mission is addressed in particular to the areas of life and work. In fact, these are the social contexts in which Christians can often be shrouded in anonymity and therefore have greater difficulty in offering an incisive evangelical witness.

3. Dear brothers and sisters of the Parish of Our Lady of the Rosary of Pompei in Magliana! I am pleased to celebrate the Day of the Lord with you and to visit your lively Christian community. Since divine Providence called me, 20 years ago, to the Chair of Peter, I dedicate some Sundays of the year to this pastoral service, which represents a primary commitment for every diocesan Bishop.

I thank God for the gift that he has given me, in these 20 years, of being able to meet 275 parish communities with their priests, men and women religious and ecclesial movements and associations. It is my sincere desire to be able to make, God willing, a pastoral visit to every parish, since, as I stressed in my first meeting with the Roman clergy, I am “deeply aware of having become Pope of the universal Church, because of being Bishop of Rome” (9 November 1978, *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 16 November 1978, p. 3).

4. Dear brothers and sisters, I embrace you all in the Lord. I especially greet the Cardinal Vicar, the Auxiliary Bishop of the area, Bishop Vincenzo Apicella, your young parish priest, Fr Gerard McCarthy — one can see he is of Irish origin, like many before him who came as missionaries from Ireland to the continent, even if not to Italy, but to the rest of the continent: certainly to Germany and other countries of Central Europe. I greet him and I see that you too greet him cordially — I also greet all the priests of the Priestly Fraternity of the Missionaries of St Charles Borromeo, who collaborate with him in guiding the community. I also greet, of course, their superior, Fr Camisasca.

A grateful thought goes to the dear Capuchin Franciscans of the Province of Abruzzo, who ran the parish from 1965 to 1997, always receiving sympathy and support from the population. May the Lord reward them for the good that they did during these years of generous pastoral service and grant them the gift of numerous and holy vocations to the advantage of the Capuchin religious family and for the good of the entire Christian community.

I also extend a cordial greeting to the Oblate Sisters of Divine Love and the Missionary Sisters of Charity, who make the gift of religious life present in this part of the Diocese. Finally, I affectionately greet each of you, dear faithful, with a special thought for the catechists, the numerous young people who are preparing for the sacraments of First Communion and Confirmation, and the many members of the parish groups who with their gifts and vivacity contribute to enlivening the entire People of God.

5. I know that two different urban settlements live together within your parish: an older one which grew up around the Church of Our Lady of the Rosary of Pompei, and one more recently built which gravitates around the Church of the Holy Martyrs of Portuense. These two centres are also characterized by a certain social differentiation. In the first, in fact, the residents are above all families of much longer formation and elderly people, while in the second there are younger family units with a considerable number of children and adolescents. This diversity is not a problem for you, but, rather, a

valuable opportunity to make a greater sense of community and sharing grow in all.

By harmoniously living the gifts that each one possesses, and by putting them with generosity at the service of one another, you will achieve that full communion of hearts, making the announcement of the Gospel of love more effective. There are also various social realities present in the parish: six schools, two clinics, two nursing homes, some company headquarters, industries, commercial and craft enterprises. It is your apostolic task to make the divine Word of salvation pervade all these areas of life and productive activity. See that it does so explicitly and adequately, corresponding as far as possible to the expectations and demands of the persons and social groups that reside here. To each and everyone bring the comfort of the merciful love of the Lord.

6. *“May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and the steadfastness of Christ”* (2 Thes 3:5).

I make these words of the Apostle Paul my own, and I want to leave them with you as a remembrance and a wish on the occasion of this visit. The love of God, fully revealed to us in the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Christ, is the inspirational source and light that illumines every missionary task. May the strength of the Spirit's love support you and help you to confess the name of Jesus courageously without ever being ashamed of the Cross.

May the Holy Martyrs of Portuense be an example to you and may the motherly protection of Our Lady of the Rosary, special patroness of your neighbourhood, assist you.

Our Lady of the Rosary of Pompei, pray for us. Amen.

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