



The Holy See

***HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II
AT POPE ST INNOCENT AND ST GUIDO BISHOP PARISH***

Sunday 28 November 1999

1. "Watch ... Watch!" (cf. *Mk* 13: 35, 37). This insistent call to watchfulness and this urgent invitation to be ready to welcome the Lord who comes characterizes the liturgical period of Advent, which we begin today. Advent is a time of waiting and of interior preparation for our meeting with the Lord. Let us therefore prepare our spirit to undertake with joy and decision this spiritual pilgrimage that will lead to the celebration of Holy Christmas.

This year there is another reason to begin Advent with deeper and more heartfelt enthusiasm. On the Holy Night and on Christmas Day there will be, in fact, the long-awaited opening of the Holy Door of St Peter's and of the Lateran Basilica.

In a certain sense, then, this Advent is an immediate preparation for the special time of grace and forgiveness which is the Great Jubilee, when we will commemorate with gratitude and joy the 2,000 years since the birth of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Dear brothers and sisters, enlightened by the Word of God and sustained by the Lord's grace, let us set out on our way towards the Lord who comes. But for what reason does "God come", or, as the Bible often says, does "he visit us"? God comes to save, to bring his children into the communion of his love.

2. I am pleased to begin this time of expectation together with your parish community. This occasion is also a good opportunity for me to thank your parish and all the other parishes of Rome for the great efforts they have made to prepare for the Holy Year, especially through the City Mission. How many faithful, priests, religious and laity have become personally involved in proclaiming and bearing witness to the Gospel! The message of Christ has thus reached almost

every man and woman in our city. Let us continue this work, which involves all believers, and make Rome ready to live to the full the grace of the Jubilee event.

In this respect I am pleased to repeat today what I recently wrote to all Romans: "Christian Rome, do not hesitate to open the doors of your homes to the pilgrims. Joyously offer fraternal hospitality" (*Letter to the Romans on the approach of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000*, 1 Nov. 1999, n. 4). The city and Diocese of Rome will be able properly to welcome the pilgrims, who will come here for the Jubilee from every part of the world, only if they first open themselves in mind and heart to the ineffable mystery of the Word made flesh.

To open the doors of the soul to the great mystery of the Incarnation by welcoming into our lives the Son of God who comes into the world: here is our task for this Advent. For the Christian communities present and active in the capital, this is the essential condition for making the journey of conversion offered by the celebration of the Holy Year and for acknowledging Jesus Christ as the only Saviour of the world: yesterday, today and for ever.

3. Dear brothers and sisters of Pope St Innocent I and St Guido Bishop Parish, with these sentiments and wishes in view of the imminent start of the Jubilee Year, I greet you all with great affection. My cordial thoughts turn, first of all, to the Cardinal Vicar, to the Auxiliary Bishop of this area, Enzo Dieci, to your zealous parish priest, Fr Maurizio Milani, and to all who in various ways assist him in the great variety of parish activities. I greet the young people and the families, the elderly and the sick, to whom I extend a special greeting.

In the name of the Diocese of Rome, I wish to thank the Guido and Bice Schillaci Ventura Foundation, which made this new parish complex possible. Built 18 years after the early days of the community, which seemed very precarious at the time, today it makes a more incisive and permanent apostolic activity possible.

Unfortunately, there are many other areas that lack a suitable parish centre, and my fervent wish is that these neighbourhoods too may soon have, as you do, a worthy and welcoming house of prayer, a gathering place in which to meet, where the Christian and human formation of the young can be provided, where assistance to families and company to the elderly and to the lonely may be offered. What prompts me to emphasize this strongly felt need is the fact that today in Rome we are celebrating the Advent of brotherhood for the construction of new churches, especially in the outlying areas.

4. Dear friends, let us give thanks to the Lord for what has been achieved here thus far. May the structures which you have help you to carry out a beneficial work of evangelization, by meeting the challenges of secularization and a certain indifference to the traditional values of Christianity. May the spiritual experiences that you will have here be a stimulus to intensify your efforts to proclaim the Gospel, being ready to account for your faith to everyone.

In response to the current crisis of values, let your Christian witness in families be clear and generous; be the first guardians of the purity of your children and young people; do everything possible so that the doors of hearts may be opened and Christ can enter the life of every inhabitant of your neighbourhood.

Do not lose heart before inevitable difficulties! God sustains you with his grace and makes your pastoral initiatives bear fruit. Together, animated by the same spirit, prepare yourselves for the great events of the Holy Year, especially for the Jubilee of the Diocese, the International Eucharistic Congress and the 15th World Youth Day. I am certain that these events will be a special time of growth for your community, instilling new missionary zeal in every member of your parish family.

5. *"O that you would rend the heavens and come down" (Is 64: 1)*. This heartfelt invocation of the prophet Isaiah effectively expresses what our sentiments should be as we wait for the Lord who is coming. Yes! The Lord already came among us 2,000 years ago, and we are preparing to celebrate the great event of the Incarnation this Christmas. Christ radically changed the course of history. At the end he will return in glory and we wait for him by striving to live our lives as an advent of trusting hope. We wish to ask for this in today's liturgical celebration.

May God help us with his grace, so that we may start Advent with enthusiasm and good will by going to meet Christ, our Redeemer, with good works (cf. *Collect*). May Mary, the Daughter of Zion chosen by God to be the Mother of the Redeemer, guide and accompany us; may she make our preparation for Christmas and for the great event of the Jubilee rich in joy and good fruit.

Praised be Jesus Christ!