



The Holy See

TE DEUM AND FIRST VESPERS OF THE SOLEMNITY OF MARY, MOTHER OF GOD

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Tuesday 31 December 2002

1. "*Born of woman, born under the law*" (Gal 4,4).

With these words the Apostle Paul sums up *the mystery of the Son of God*, "begotten not made, one in being with the Father".

"*Tu Patris sempiternus es Filius*" (You are the eternal Son of the Father), we have just sung in the hymn *Te Deum*. In the inscrutable abyss of God, *Christ's mission* has its origin *ab aeterno* (from eternity), and is destined "*to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth*" (Eph 1,10).

Time, beginning with creation, reaches its *fullness* when it is "visited" by God in the Person of the Only-Begotten Son. At the moment when *Jesus is born in Bethlehem*, an event of incalculable importance in the history of salvation, God's goodness acquires a visible, tangible "face" (cf. Ti 3,4).

Before the Child whom Mary wraps in swaddling clothes and lays in a manger *everything seems to stand still*. The One who is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, cries in the arms of a woman: the Creator is born among us!

In Jesus the heavenly Father wanted to redeem us from sin and to adopt us as sons (cf. Gal 4,5). With Mary let us pause in worshipful silence before so great a mystery!

2. These are the sentiments that pervade us as we celebrate the First Vespers of the Solemnity of

the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God. The liturgy makes this important Marian feast coincide with the end of the year and the beginning of the new year. This evening, to the contemplation of the mystery of the Virgin's divine motherhood let us join our hymn of gratitude for the ending of 2002, while on the horizon of history 2003 appears. Let us thank God from the depths of our hearts for all the benefits he has bestowed upon us during the past 12 months.

I think especially of the generous response of so many young people to the Christian message; I think of the increasing ecclesial sensitivity to the values of peace, life and the safeguard of creation; I also think of certain significant steps on the not easy ecumenical route. For everything let us thank God. Indeed, his gifts always precede and accompany every positive gesture we make.

3. I am pleased to live these moments, as I do every year, with all of you dear brothers and sisters, who represent the diocesan community of Rome. I warmly greet each of you. I greet the Cardinal Vicar, the Auxiliary Bishops, the priests and the women religious involved in pastoral service in many parishes and diocesan offices. I greet the Mayor of Rome, the members of the municipal administration and council, as well as the other provincial and regional authorities. My thoughts go to *everyone who lives in our city and in our region*, particularly those who are going through situations of difficulty or hardship.

This year, the path of the Church of Rome has been marked by a special *dedication to recruiting and fostering priestly and religious vocations*. The diocesan convention last June focused on this theme, so crucial for the present and future of evangelization. The various pastoral initiatives and activities promoted by the diocese converge on this objective. Attention to vocations belongs correctly to the *option for mission* which, following the City Mission, has become the direction of the life and pastoral service of the Church of Rome.

4. Everyone must feel personally involved in this far-reaching missionary and vocational activity. However, in the first place, it is the task of priests to work for vocations by living joyfully the great gift and mystery that God has planted in them, so as to "generate" new and holy vocations.

The pastoral care of vocations should be a priority for *parishes*, that are called to be schools of holiness and prayer, training grounds for charity and service to the brothers and sisters, and especially for *families*, who, as vital cells, make up the parish community. When there is love between spouses, the children grow up morally healthy and vocations to the priesthood and the consecrated life take root more easily.

Dear families of Rome, this year, which I have proclaimed the "Year of the Rosary", I invite you to recite the Rosary daily, so that an atmosphere may be created in you that fosters listening to God and faithfully doing his will.

5. "*Fiat misericordia tua, Domine, super nos, quemadmodum speravimus in Te* May your mercy always be upon us, Lord, as we have hoped in you".

Your mercy, Lord! In this liturgy at the end of the year, praise and thanksgiving should be joined to a sincere *examination of conscience*, made individually and as a community. *Let us ask* the Lord's *pardon* for the shortcomings of which we are guilty, certain that God, who is rich in mercy, is infinitely greater than our sins.

"In you we have hoped". "In you Lord" we repeat this evening, "is our hope". At Christmas you brought joy to the world, making shine on the paths of persons and peoples your light. Anxieties and worries cannot put it out; the brightness of your presence is a constant comfort.

May *every man and woman of good will* approach and experience the power of your love and your peace! May the city of Rome and all humanity welcome you as their only Saviour. This is what I hope for all of you; a hope that I place in the hands of Mary, Mother of God, *Salus Populi Romani* (*Salvation of the Roman People*).

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