



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO CARDINALS, PAPAL HOUSEHOLD AND ROMAN CURIA
FOR THE ANNUAL EXCHANGE OF CHRISTMAS GREETINGS**

Tuesday, 22 December 1998

1. "*Quam dilecta tabernacula tua, Domine virtutum! Concupiscit et deficit anima mea in atria Domini*" (Ps 84 [83], 2-3).

These verses of the psalm which we recite are a good preparation for Holy Mass and draw us into the atmosphere of the Nativity of the Lord. Indeed, they recall Mary and Joseph's anxious search on the Holy Night for a *tabernaculum*, a suitable dwelling where Jesus could be born. An unfruitful search, "because there was no place for them in the inn" (Lk 2:7). The Son of Mary would be born in a stable, when he should have had his own house and a welcoming home, as is every child's right.

What feelings are stirred by this consideration! Christmas calls to mind the domestic hearth; it makes us think of the family atmosphere in which the child is welcomed as a gift and a source of deep joy. Tradition calls for Christmas to be spent in the family, together with those one loves. It is a Christmas custom to exchange greetings, to give thanks and to ask one another's forgiveness in a climate of authentic Christian spirituality.

2. I would like this atmosphere also to mark today's meeting with you, Your Eminences, Venerable Brothers in the episcopate and the priesthood, dear religious and lay people who work in the Roman Curia. I thank dear Cardinal Bernardin Gantin for his affectionate address, expressing the sentiments of all of you who are called to take part uniquely in the mystery of that *household, that family* which is the Church. The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council rightly compared the Church to a house and a family. It described her as the *household of God*, of which we are "living stones" and in which we dwell (cf. *Lumen gentium*, nn. 6, 18), it called her the *family of God* (cf. *ibid*, nn. 6, 28, 32, 51), to which we belong. The Roman Curia is a privileged expression of this "dwelling place". Indeed, the Bishops of the whole world pass through here on their *ad limina* visits and for other ordinary or extraordinary meetings, as recently happened with the Special Assembly for Oceania of the Synod of Bishops and previously for the other continental Synods. Yes, the Apostolic See wants to be the home of the whole Church, a home in which the birth of the Son of God is awaited with

special intensity.

3. "*Ecce quam bonum et quam iucundum habitare fratres in unum!*" (Ps 133 [132]:1).

The now imminent Jubilee must find a climate of expectation and spiritual fervour throughout the Church and especially in the Roman Curia. The third and last stage of immediate preparation, in 1999, invites us to focus our gaze on the mystery of God the Father, who "so loved the world that he gave his only Son" (*Jn* 3:16). In past years thanks to the generous commitment of the Central Committee, the dicasteries of the Roman Curia, the national committees and the diocesan communities the celebration of the Jubilee and its spiritual dimension are becoming increasingly defined and distinctive.

This work has culminated in the publication of the Bull *Incarnationis mysterium* with which I officially announced the Holy Year. Then, in the background, there have been a few important moments of reflection, such as the symposiums on *anti-Judaism* and on the *Inquisition*, during which it was possible to reflect on several painful events of the past, in order to offer an ever freer and more consistent ecclesial witness. Other initiatives have blossomed in all the ecclesial communities throughout the world. In the Diocese of Rome, for example, the City Mission, which is being carried out under the direction of the Cardinal Vicar and the Auxiliary Bishops, is producing numerous and significant apostolic and missionary fruits. It is a question of spiritual zeal which I hope will continue to grow, so that the Church can offer the world a unanimous Gospel witness, proclaiming Christ the one Saviour of the world yesterday, today, and for ever (cf. *Heb* 13:8)

4. "*Confitemini Domino, quoniam bonus, quoniam in saeculum misericordia eius*" (Ps 118 [117]:1).

In the month of October, the Lord granted me the grace to celebrate the 20th anniversary of my election as Bishop of Rome and Pastor of the universal Church. Once again I give him thanks for the gifts which he has showered upon me. In this Jubilee celebration I felt surrounded by the affection of the whole Catholic Church which was very close to me, with prayer and countless acts of devout participation. Together with those from the ecclesial community, I was pleased to receive congratulations from representatives of the other religious confessions, Heads of State, well-known figures of culture and the economy, as well as good wishes from individual people, including many children and elderly persons, the sick and the suffering, young people and families. I would like to express my deep gratitude to them all, as, thinking back on the question Jesus asked Peter: "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" (*Jn* 21:16), I ask everyone to continue to pray that every day I may serve the Lord and the brethren he has entrusted to me with renewed love.

5. "*Omnium me servum feci, ut plures lucrifacerem*" (1 *Cor* 9:19).

Concern for the universal Church has also led me this year to make several apostolic journeys, as the Cardinal Dean has emphasized. They were moments of great emotion and spiritual joy. How can I forget first of all my longed for visit to the island of Cuba, where the presence of the Successor of Peter awakened such enthusiasm and began a promising movement of spiritual renewal? Or my apostolic pilgrimage to Nigeria, where I had the joy of beatifying Fr Cyprian Michael Iwene Tansi, holding him up as a model of evangelization and reconciliation precisely in the land where he was born, and which saw him as a tireless preacher of the Good News and peacemaker?

Last June I was able to make another visit to Austria to beatify three children of that nation Sr Restituta Kafka, Fr Schwartz and Fr Kern while in the last part of the year I went once again to Croatia, where I had the joy of proposing for the veneration of the faithful Bl. Alojzije Stepinac, the heroic Cardinal Archbishop of Zagreb who enriched the glorious ranks of the martyrs of that land with the offering of his life. Continuously harassed by the communist regime, he could courageously make an invincible gift of himself to Christ and to his brothers and sisters, sacrificing himself for the unity of the Church.

In thanking divine Providence for the pilgrimages I was able to make in 1998, I entrust to the Lord those which, with his help, I will be able to undertake this coming year, starting with my Pastoral Visit to Mexico where, please God, I will present the Apostolic Exhortation in which I have gathered the results of the Special Assembly for America of the Synod of Bishops.

6. "*Vae enim mihi est, si non evangelizavero!*" (1 Cor 9:16).

It is the awareness that she must constantly evangelize which guides the Church, called to proclaim Christ, the truth of man, at all times. To respond to this need, I have published a few important documents, first and foremost the Encyclical Letter *Fides et ratio*, with which I intended to express trust in the efforts of human thought, inviting my contemporaries to rediscover the role of reason and to recognize faith as a valuable ally in their progress toward the truth.

Witnesses of Gospel truth are also the blessed and saints whom I have been able to raise to the honours of the altar. Among them, I would like to recall Sr Benedicta of the Cross, Edith Stein, a Jewish woman, philosopher, nun and martyr. In a troubled century like that in which she was granted to live, she stands before us to invite us to take the narrow way of discernment and acceptance of the Cross, never separating love from the truth, so as to avoid exposing ourselves to the risk of destructive deceit.

Another valuable witness to the truth was offered by all those Bishops, priests, consecrated persons and lay people during the year in various countries of Africa, Asia and America who suffered and in turn paid with their blood for their fidelity to Christ and the Church. I hope that their sacrifices will encourage believers and contribute to building an atmosphere of genuine freedom and peace in the world.

7. "*Filius hominis non venit ut ministraretur ei ...*" (Mk 10:45).

Conscious of her mission, the Church becomes a sharer in the joys and hopes of humanity, to continue the very work of Christ, "who came into the world to bear witness to the truth, to save and not to judge, to serve and not to be served" (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 3). This apostolic and missionary aspiration spurs the Church to share in the problems and tragedies of humanity in every corner of the world. The signing of agreements between the Holy See and several States has contributed this year to making the Church concretely present and respected among the peoples.

My gratitude goes especially to all those who strive to make God's tenderness tangible for every human being with their faithful service which is often humble and unseen. This admirable dedication has become more generous and timely on the occasion of the painful natural disasters that have struck various

regions of the world. It is enough to remember the devastating effects of Hurricane Mitch which the Cardinal Dean mentioned. In various circumstances, wonderful pages of human and Christian solidarity have been written.

8. "*Ut omnes unum sint ... ut credat mundus*" (Jn 17:21).

The family atmosphere evoked by the Christmas holidays, the approach of the beginning of the third Christian millennium and the urgent need for the new evangelization make Christ's invitation to unity ever more pressing for those who belong to him through the one Baptism.

Many meetings and ecumenical initiatives have contributed during this year to reinforcing this atmosphere of concern, dialogue and serene searching for unity among the Christian Churches, a necessary premise for achieving an ecumenism which is positive and fruitful.

Grateful to God, I recall the meetings with the Heads of the Christian confessions during my apostolic journeys and the participation of the Holy See's observers at the Eighth Assembly of the Ecumenical Council of Churches.

As I joyfully point out the serene collaboration that is taking place among believers in Christ, I hope that under the impetus of the Great Jubilee it will be possible to live a new ecumenical season.

9. Your Eminences, Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the priesthood, men and women religious, dear lay collaborators, this rapid review of the most important aspects of the Holy See's activity in the year just coming to an end now traditional at this annual gathering highlights the daily service that each one of you accomplishes, to ensure that the Good News of the Incarnation of the Word reaches every human being in every corner of the earth.

Your presence close to the Bishop of Rome enables him to exercise concretely his mission of being the "rock" on which the Church of Christ is founded (cf. *Mt* 16:18) and to strengthen, support and guide his brothers and sisters in the faith (cf. *Lk* 22:31). I would therefore like to thank you individually for the generosity, competence and discretion with which you serve the Apostolic See. I hope that each one of you will become ever more aware and deeply happy with the service you offer the Church and the Gospel, and will see in your daily efforts the love of Christ, who, thanks to you, brings the joyful message of salvation to the poor, prisoners, the blind, the oppressed and all those in search of truth and peace (cf. *Lk* 4:18).

May Christmas find us all, like Mary, filled with wonder at the One who "though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men" (*Phil* 2:6-7). May the mystery of Christmas awaken in each one the sentiments of humility and love present in Christ's heart, and make you all worthy sons and daughters of the one Father.

With these wishes, I implore the Christmas gift of joy for each of you, and, as I also express my fervent good wishes for the New Year, I cordially impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you and to your loved ones.

Happy Christmas!

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