



The Holy See

***GREETINGS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE JOHN XXIII
TO THE MEMBERS OF THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS
AFTER THE MIDNIGHT MASS***

Sunday, 25 December 1960

Here we are together once again for the joyous celebration of the feast of Christmas, gentlemen. And what is the mystery of Christmas, but the Blessed Virgin with her divine son: *Flos de radice ejus*? It is the Son of God Himself who comes in the fullness of time to dwell among men. *Verbum caro factum est et habitavit in nobis*. Yes, truly, God has become man and has come into our midst!

After all these years, it still moves Us to recall a passage touching on the mystery of Christmas that We read as a young priest (Père Faber: *Bethléem ou le mystère de la sainte enfance*; Paris, Retaud -Bray, 1885, cinquième édition, ch. III, pp. 151-229). The author, a great English spiritual writer of the last century, portrays the scene at the «Midnight-cave», and stresses the amazing contrast between the Majesty of God and the humility of His entry into this world, between His power in heaven and His helplessness on earth. The «Desired of the Nations» finds only a poor stable to shelter Him, for men have completely failed to see the divinity that lay hidden behind a mysterious reserve: «They looked everywhere rather than turn toward the cave of Bethlehem!».

But tonight, thank God, you might say that all nations are at the foot of the crib, gathered together by the gentle goodness of this indescribable mystery. The divine Infant is looking at all of them with eyes full of kindness and goodness, and not just by means of His divine omniscience as He did then, but rather He sees them visibly present from the East to the West, from Rome to Egypt, not to mention Greece. All of the centuries are there: the past and the future, which unfold their pages before the eyes of the new-born Child.

The Bishop of Rome, who has celebrated the holy mysteries on this wonderful night, feels his heart throbbing with the gift of faith that enkindles hope and charity there as well. He shares this

precious gift with the whole flock – lambs and sheep – whose shepherd he is. And on this night he mystically accompanies all of them in adoring the mystery of the Nativity.

Two thousand years ago, the heavenly spirits and the forces of nature, the shepherds and the magi, all gathered together in a single profession of humility and gave the world a foretaste of what God was doing for the benefit of men and in the hearts of men.

Today, this Mass that has brought us together has truly gathered the whole world around the divine Child of Bethlehem, around Mary, the Virgin most pure, around Joseph, whom we might call «the most hidden of all the saints of God».

Gentlemen, you represent many, many nations before the lowly successor of Peter; We feel We can see the feelings and desires of all peoples, all their sufferings and their hopes joined together in you and We want to lay them before Jesus, the Son of God and son of Mary. It is to Him that We are lifting up Our humble prayer, which is that of all men, begging Heaven to grant what earth cannot give: brotherhood, love, and peace.

O sweet and gentle Infant of Bethlehem, grant Us the gift of sharing with Our whole soul this profound mystery of Christmas. Put into the hearts of men the peace that at times they sent so openly and that Thou alone can give them. Help them to know themselves better, and to live like brothers as the sons of one single Father. Reveal to them, too, Thy beauty, Thy holiness and Thy purity. Awaken in their hearts love and gratitude for Thy infinite goodness. Unite them all in Thy charity. And give them Thy heavenly peace. Amen.

* *The Pope Speaks*, vol.7 n°1 p.55-56.