



The Holy See

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

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

St Peter's Basilica
Monday, 31 December 2007

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

As this year is also ending, we are gathered in the Vatican Basilica to celebrate First Vespers of the Solemnity of Mary Most Holy, Mother of God. The liturgy makes this important Marian feast coincide with the end and the beginning of the solar year. Our hymn of gratitude for 2007 which is drawing to a close and for 2008 which we are already glimpsing is therefore combined with contemplation of the mystery of the divine motherhood. Time passes and its inexorable passing induces us to raise our gaze in deep gratitude to the One who is eternal, to the Lord of time. Let us thank him together, dear brothers and sisters, on behalf of the entire diocesan community of Rome. I address my greeting to each one of you. In the first place, I greet the Cardinal Vicar, the Auxiliary Bishops, the priests and consecrated persons as well as all the lay faithful who are gathered here. I greet Mr Mayor and the Authorities present, and I extend my thoughts to the entire population of Rome and in a special way to all those in conditions of difficulty and hardship. I assure them all of my cordial closeness, strengthened by constant remembrance in prayer.

In the short Reading from the Letter to the Galatians that we have just heard, speaking of the liberation of man brought about by God with the mystery of the Incarnation, St Paul very discreetly mentions the One through whom the Son of God entered the world: "when the time had fully come", he wrote, "God sent forth his Son, born of woman" (*Gal* 4: 4). The Church contemplates in the "woman" the features of Mary of Nazareth, a unique woman because she was called to carry out a mission that brought her into very close contact with Christ: indeed, it was an absolutely unique relationship, because Mary is Mother of the Saviour. Just as obviously, however, we can and must affirm that she is our Mother because, by living her very special maternal relationship

with the Son, she shared in his mission *for us and for the salvation of all people*. In contemplating her, the Church makes out her own features: Mary lives faith and charity; Mary is also a creature saved by the one Saviour; Mary collaborates in the initiative of the salvation of all humanity. Thus, Mary constitutes for the Church her truest image: she in whom the Ecclesial Community must continually discover the authentic sense of its own vocation and its own mystery.

This short but intense Pauline passage then continues, showing how the fact that the Son assumed human nature unfolds the perspective of a radical change of the actual human condition. Paul says in it that "God sent forth his Son... to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons" (*Gal 4: 4-5*). The Incarnate Word transforms human life from within, sharing with us his being as Son of the Father. He became like us in order for us to become like him: children of the Son, hence, people free from the law of sin. Is this not a fundamental reason to raise our thanksgiving to God? A thanksgiving which can only be even more motivated at the end of a year, considering the many benefits and his constant assistance that we have experienced over the period of the past 12 months. This is why every Christian community gathers together this evening and sings the *Te Deum*, a traditional hymn of praise and thanksgiving to the Most Holy Trinity. This is what we shall also do at the end of this liturgical meeting of ours, before the Most Blessed Sacrament.

As we sing we will pray: "*Te ergo, quæsumus, tuis famulis subveni, quos pretioso sanguine redemisti*: Come then, Lord, and help your people, bought with the price of your own blood". This is our prayer this evening: Come with your mercy, Lord, to the aid of the inhabitants of our City in which, as elsewhere, serious needs and poverty weigh on the lives of people and families, preventing them from looking with trust to the future. Many, especially young people, are attracted by a false exaltation or rather, by the profanation of the body and the trivialization of sexuality; so it is difficult to list the many challenges bound up with consumerism and secularism which call into question believers and people of good will. To say it in a word, in Rome one also notes that lack of hope and trust in life that constitutes the "obscure" evil of modern Western society.

But if the deficiencies are evident, there is no lack of light and reasons for hope on which to implore special divine blessings. Precisely in this perspective, in singing the *Te Deum* we shall pray: "*Salvum fac populum tuum, Domine, et benedic hereditati tuæ* - Save your people, Lord, and bless your inheritance". O Lord, look upon and protect the diocesan community in particular, committed on the educational front to responding ever more vigorously to that great "educational emergency" of which I spoke last 11 June when I met the participants in the diocesan convention, or in other words, the increasing difficulty encountered in transmitting the basic values of life and upright conduct to the new generations (cf. [*Address to the Diocese of Rome Convention*](#), 11 June 2007; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 20 June, p. 3). Let us calmly and with patient trust face this emergency first of all in the context of the family. Moreover, it is certainly comforting to note that the work undertaken in recent years by parishes, movements and associations for the pastoral care of the family is continuing to develop and bear fruit.

Also protect, Lord, the missionary initiatives which involve the world of youth: they are increasing and there are now an important number of young people who are assuming responsibility and the joy of proclamation and Gospel witness in the first person. In this context, how can we fail to thank God for the precious pastoral service offered to the world by the Roman universities? It would be appropriate to start something similar in schools, despite the numerous difficulties.

Bless, Lord, the many young men and adults who in recent decades have been ordained to the priesthood for the Diocese of Rome. At the present time there are 28 deacons who are awaiting priestly ordination, scheduled for next April. Thus, the average age of the clergy is rejuvenated and it is also possible to respond to the increase in pastoral needs, such as going to the help of other dioceses. Especially in the suburbs, the need for new parish complexes is growing, and there are eight currently under construction, after I myself had the pleasure not long ago of consecrating the one most recently completed: the Parish of *Santa Maria del Rosario ai Martiri Portuensi*. It is lovely to be able to tangibly feel the joy and gratitude of the inhabitants of a neighbourhood as they enter their own new church for the first time.

"In te, Domine, speravi: non confundar in æternum - Lord, show us your love and mercy; for we put our trust in you". The majestic hymn of the *Te Deum* ends with this cry of faith, of total trust in God, with this solemn proclamation of our hope. Christ is our "trustworthy" hope, and to this theme I dedicated my recent Encyclical entitled *Spe Salvi*. But our hope is always essentially also hope for others, and only thus is it truly hope for each one of us (cf. n. 48). Dear brothers and sisters of the Church of Rome, let us ask the Lord to make each one of us authentic leaven of hope in our various milieus, so that it will be possible to build a better future for the whole city. This is my wish for everyone on the eve of a New Year, a wish that I entrust to the motherly intercession of Mary, Mother of God and Star of Hope. Amen!

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