



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT TO THE PARISH OF SAINT CATHERINE OF SIENA IN ROME

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Sunday, 10 October 1999

1. *"The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a marriage feast" (Mt 22: 2).*

In the Gospel just proclaimed, Jesus describes the kingdom of God as a great marriage feast, with an abundance of food and drink, in a joyous and festive atmosphere for all the guests. At the same time, Jesus emphasizes the need for the "wedding garment" (cf. *ibid.*, v. 11), that is, the need to respect the conditions required for taking part in this solemn feast.

The image of the feast is also present in the first reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah, which stresses the universality of the invitation "for all peoples" (cf. *Is* 25: 6), and the disappearance of all suffering and pain: "God will wipe away tears from all faces" (cf. *ibid.*, v. 8).

These are God's great promises, which were fulfilled in the redemption brought by Christ and which the Church proclaims in her evangelizing mission and offers to all mankind. Communion of life with God and our brethren, which the action of the Holy Spirit brings to believers' lives, is centred on the Eucharistic banquet, the source and summit of all Christian experience. The liturgy reminds us of this every time we prepare to receive Christ's Body. Before Communion the priest says to the faithful: "Happy are those who are called to his supper". Yes! We are truly happy because we are invited to the eternal banquet of God's salvation, prepared for the whole world.

2. Dear brothers and sisters of St Catherine of Siena Parish! In coming among you today, I am resuming my customary pastoral visits to the parishes of Rome. I thank the Lord for giving me the opportunity to talk to your parish community which is dedicated to St Catherine of Siena. As you know so well, at the opening of the Synod of Bishops for Europe a few days ago, I had the joy of proclaiming her co-patroness of Europe, together with Bridget of Sweden and Edith Stein. To her and to the other holy patronesses of Europe I again entrust the work of the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops and its commitment to the new evangelization of our continent.

While I hope that you will grow under St Catherine's constant protection, I joyfully greet you all. I greet the Cardinal Vicar, the Vicegerent, your beloved parish priest, Mons. Aldo Zega, and the assistant priests. I extend a cordial greeting to the communities twinned with your parish, especially the one in Trieste, represented here today by a significant delegation. I greet the members of the many parish groups and everyone involved in its various formative, sociocultural and charitable activities.

3. I am also grateful to the Marianist Fathers, who are hosting us for this celebration. They have been willing for a long time now to have the parish's temporary facilities on land belonging to their congregation. I also extend heartfelt thanks to the Hospital Sisters of Mercy who, since the parish's foundation, have generously made their church available, providing care of the sacristy and many other types of service.

Dear religious, thank you for your readiness to meet the parish's pastoral needs. I firmly hope that this fruitful cooperation will continue and increase not only here, but everywhere. The challenge of the new evangelization, in fact, involves the various members of God's People and asks each person to offer his own resources in order to serve the Gospel better. In this way, diocesan and religious priests, parish communities and religious families work together, while respecting their legitimate autonomy, in proclaiming and bearing witness to Christ, the one Redeemer of humanity.

Your parish has taken this path so far; I encourage you to continue on it with trust and generosity.

After the first difficult years of its foundation, your parish has been intensely community-oriented, achieving a good level of pastoral structuring and organization. Even though it lacks a real centre for its own activities, it has been able to offer the residents of the area continuous catechesis and Christian formation, as well as a concrete witness of Gospel charity. Keep up the good work!

While I ardently hope that you can soon obtain land to build an adequate place of worship, I invite you to cherish the experience gained in these years. In your apostolic work, do not be content with serving those who already come to church or who have occasional contact with the Christian faith.

Go in search of every person and proclaim the Gospel to all, wherever people live, work, study, suffer or spend their leisure time.

4. This is the mission to which we are called especially in view of the Jubilee Year, which will begin in a few months with the opening of the Holy Door. Take as your example your heavenly patroness, St Catherine, a humble and fearless Dominican tertiary who gave herself unsparingly for the Church. For everyone may this great saint be not only a special protectress but a model to follow on the path of holiness.

Follow her, dear young people who are preparing for World Youth Day. In this regard, I recall what I wrote in my Message for this Day: "May it be your holy ambition to be holy, as he - [Christ] - is holy!" (n. 3). Catherine of Siena admirably expressed the synthesis of contemplation and action, for which you must strive if you are to be the apostles of the new millennium.

Rome is preparing to celebrate an International Eucharistic Congress: may St Catherine's love for the Eucharist be a source of inspiration for all believers, so that they will always be moved to love God and neighbour, especially the neediest. Women of this community, look in particular to St Catherine of Siena: may her characteristic female genius, which made her fearless and courageous, spur you to be strong, constructive and creative in your love for God and in caring for others.

5. *"I can do all things in him who strengthens me"* (Phil 4: 13). With these words St Paul expresses the deep meaning of his missionary life. This also sums up the spiritual experience of St Catherine of Siena and of every faithful Gospel servant. My wish is that your community too will be able to repeat with the Apostle Paul and with Christ's true disciples: "I can do all things in him who strengthens me"!

Let us ask the Lord, in the words of today's Collect, to precede and always accompany our personal and community journey with his grace, so that, sustained by his fatherly aid and the motherly intercession of Mary, Mother of the Church, we will never tire of doing good.

Amen!

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