



The Holy See

MASS FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS
OF THE UNIVERSITIES OF ROME

HOMILY OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II

Tuesday, 14 December 1999

1. *"See, the Lord is coming.... Then there will be endless day"* (Antiphon; cf. Zec 14: 5, 7).

The words of the liturgy recall the distinctive spiritual climate of Advent in which our celebration is being held in preparation for Christmas.

Dear young students, I welcome you all with great affection. I greet and thank Prof. Giuseppe D'Ascenzo, who expressed your common sentiments in noble words, and Dr Antonio Cicchetti, who explained what you have done and are planning to do for the Jubilee gathering. I respectfully greet the Minister, the rectors, the teachers and administrative staff, and I thank them for their presence at this meeting with the academic community of Rome and of Italy, which began 20 years ago. I am also pleased to greet the delegations from the chaplaincies of several European universities which are twinned with their Roman counterparts.

2. This year, Advent not only prepares us for *Christmas* but also for the *Great Jubilee* of the Year 2000. On Christmas Eve, the Holy Door will be opened in St Peter's Basilica. This is an event with powerful symbolic meaning: it represents the *opening of a universal passage* as a point on which all persons and peoples are invited to converge, in order to enter into the love, justice and peace of God's kingdom. This universal passage is "Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of man, the centre of the universe and of history" (Encyclical Letter *Redemptor hominis*, n. 1.)

The rite of opening the Holy Door will take place in every Diocese of the world. The value of the Jubilee is eminently spiritual; yet it is strongly linked to the Church's history and concrete presence in the world. The Jubilee too draws life from the wonderful unity between the divine and the

human, the heavenly and the earthly, the historical and the transcendent which marks every ecclesial reality.

3. The Jubilee theme chosen for the university world, "*The university for a new humanism*", is very suggestive. It invites us to develop and increase humanity's rich *scientific heritage* in accordance with a *project which places man at its centre*.

The Incarnation event opens the believing intellect to knowledge of God's love for man and to understanding the meaning of life and history. By fixing our gaze on the mystery of the Incarnate Word - as we are invited to do by the now imminent Great Jubilee - man discovers himself (cf. Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et spes*, n. 22). In a special way the researcher and student who are believers understand that every dimension of an authentic humanism is closely linked to the mystery of Christ (cf. *Redemptor hominis*, n. 10).

To serve man: this is the task which, on the threshold of the third millennium, is especially entrusted to you who work in the university. Dear students and teachers, important events await you in the Jubilee Year. I am thinking of *World Youth Day*, which will involve numerous university students, and I thank the rectors of the Roman universities for their sensitivity in encouraging the projects for welcoming the young people and the twinning programmes. I am also thinking of the *World Meeting of Teachers*, which will take place in September, and I encourage all who are preparing for this event to persevere in their praiseworthy commitment.

4. The *universal scope* of these Jubilee meetings is in harmony with a biblical theme suggested a few moments ago by the first reading: the "*pilgrimage of peoples*". It is a theme especially dear to the prophets of Israel, who denounce the infidelity of the chosen people and announce the birth of a new people, formed of all who from every nation and race will be converted to the Lord and to his justice. This theme emphasizes *the priority requirement of repentance* and puts us on guard against the danger of "self-satisfaction", evidenced very clearly in today's Gospel passage.

The essential prerequisite of faith is conversion, that is, sincere repentance and the deep desire to change one's heart with God's help. It is an *interior movement* from oneself to God, which enables us to rediscover ourselves in a new and genuine way. One begins by becoming aware of one's own poverty, one's own need for salvation. Pride, presumption and trust in oneself alone, which are expressed in arrogance, deceit and wickedness, impede or hinder conversion.

The repentant sinner "goes before" those who consider themselves righteous and in no need of repentance (*Mt 21: 31*). Thus the Jubilee is meant for everyone, but it only helps those who repent and are willing to follow, with the Lord's grace, an authentic path of conversion.

5. The pilgrimage of peoples to the God of Israel, who in Jesus Christ became man and came to dwell among us, is renewed during the season of Advent. This year, however, it becomes

particularly intense. The Church has prepared to enter the Year 2000 through five "*continental Synods*", that is, five Special Assemblies of the Synod of Bishops, respectively *for Africa, America, Oceania and Europe*. Each Assembly was followed by a document with analysis and guidelines for evangelization.

What do these Synods and documents mean? We can say that through them the universal Church wishes to express the path she is taking in every part of the world in the footsteps of Christ. The People of God who live on all the continents speak of themselves, of how they are following Christ in his pilgrimage with the men and women of our time.

These synodal events therefore *express a great movement*. It is as if people of different nations, tongues, races and cultures were setting out from all the corners of the world, called by the voice of the angels announcing the Good News: "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased*" (Lk 2: 14). We are also included in this invitation and in this saving journey to Christ, who was born 2,000 years ago in a stable at Bethlehem and who in this Jubilee year becomes present among us in a particular way, to make us all share in his divine sonship.

6. Dear friends, your position as individuals who work and study in the university helps you to take part, with your specific skill and sensitivity, in this universal pilgrimage to Christ, the truth about man and history. Love your studies, the knowledge which is broadened and deepened through research and is enriched by dialogue, revealing the splendour of truth. Love life, always respect it, especially where it is most frail and defenceless.

May Mary, Seat of Wisdom, help you to be faithful to God and to man. We are approaching Christmas, which is now close. We are looking at this threshold of the Year 2000, which we will shortly have to cross. Everyone is looking at this threshold, especially young people, because it is to young people that this century, this coming millennium belongs. My wish is that you will courageously enter this time that awaits us. I hope you will enter this time with Christ's strength for the future of all humanity.

Praised be Jesus Christ!

