



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT TO ST BENEDICT JOSEPH LABRE PARISH IN ROME

HOMILY OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II

Sunday, 31 October 1999

1. *"You have one master, the Christ"* (Mt 23: 10). The Gospel passage we heard a few moments ago recounts Jesus' dispute with the scribes and Pharisees. Echoing the voice of the Old Testament prophets (cf. *Mal 2: 1-10*), Jesus condemns their hypocrisy based on the presumption of being righteous before God. This is an attitude that removes man from the path of good. And it is an attitude that can lurk today in the human heart.

Jesus' words warn us against every "Pharisaism", that is, from the concern for appearances, from the easy compromise with falseness and the temptation to assert ourselves independently of the divine will. Before man's proud pretence of being able to do without God, Jesus, the real Master, addresses a pressing invitation to receive the action of divine grace with humble openness: "Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted" (Mt 23: 12).

2. Dear brothers and sisters of St Benedict Joseph Labre Parish, I greet you all with affection, with a special thought for the Cardinal Vicar, for the Auxiliary of the area, Bishop Enzo Dieci, for your parish priest, Fr Francesco Troiani, and for everyone who assists him in the pastoral care of this young parish community.

Yes, yours is a young community. Young because of its date of birth: the first families came to this new neighbourhood in 1993. Young because of its make-up: the majority of the community consists of young families who came to live in this area called "La Torraccia" after their wedding and who now welcome into these new homes the gift of children with which God wished to bless their marriage. In this regard, I know that over 200 Baptisms are administered in this parish every

year and that there are many children enrolled in catechism classes. To you, dear children, to your parents, catechists and teachers goes my cordial greeting and encouragement to continue generously with your active participation in the life of the parish community and in your joyous witness to Christian values.

3. While we thank God for the fundamental role that the family based on marriage and enriched with the gift of children has in the Church and in society, we cannot fail to be concerned today about the many family units that are unfortunately in difficulty and couples - even while happily married - who do not have the courage to open themselves to the gift of life. May the Lord touch the hearts of our brothers and sisters and enable them to persevere in married life and to be generous in welcoming children.

Today's pastoral visit to your parish offers me the occasion to make my own the appeal addressed a few days ago by the Bishops of Lazio to the political and institutional authorities and to all citizens (cf. *L'Osservatore Romano*, 22 October 1999, p. 8). I once again ask the civil authorities to spare no effort in promoting and protecting the family based on marriage, without allowing it to be confused with other and quite different forms of union. I urge the ecclesial communities and every individual believer to work with every greater zeal for the family and the values it bears, convinced that these efforts effectively contribute to the common good.

In this regard, I hope that even in your recently built neighbourhood there soon may be those essential structures that support the families who reside here, enabling them to open themselves with greater generosity to the gift of life and to lead tranquil married lives. I am thinking of the necessity for day-care centres, kindergartens and all those structures which help parents in their educational task.

4. Dear brothers and sisters, in coming here among you this morning I realized that your new parish church is basically the only meeting place in the neighbourhood. The parish structures must therefore be open to receive whoever knocks at the door in search of spiritual and material help.

I know that in this parish pastoral activity began in an itinerant form, due to the lack of a fixed place of worship and parish structures. I congratulate you for transforming this initial inconvenience into an occasion of authentic Gospel witness, following the example of your patron, St Benedict Joseph Labre. As you know, he was a pilgrim. Called the "French saint", he came from beyond the Alps to Rome and lived without a fixed abode, trusting only in God and being abundantly nourished by his Word and the Eucharist. Roman by adoption, he died in sanctity in a butcher's poor back-shop, just a short distance from the Colosseum, where he lived among the ruins.

Following the example of St Benedict Joseph Labre, may you too preserve the enthusiasm and style of the early years of your parish community, which was characterized by taking the Gospel message from house to house and by the celebration of the Eucharist in the entrance halls of the

apartment buildings. This must remain your pastoral style, even if now you can enjoy this lovely new parish church, while pursuing the objectives and goals of the City Mission.

5. The Holy Year of 2000 is fast approaching! It will be an intensely "Eucharistic" year, especially during the month of June, when the International Eucharistic Congress will be held here in Rome.

As I invite the entire Christian community to prepare for this great faith event with faith and devotion, I urge everyone to rediscover the precious gift of the Eucharistic Bread, which is "the strength of the weak, the support of the sick, the balm that heals wounds, and the viaticum for those leaving this world. It is the strength of the faithful who work in environments and circumstances in which their presence is the only possibility of proclaiming the Gospel" (*Basic Text*, 47th International Eucharistic Congress, 2 June 1999, n. 11). May the celebration of the International Eucharistic Congress give the Christians of Rome and of the whole world the strength to live ever more intensely that missionary spirit which must animate the Church of the third millennium.

6. All the disciples of Christ are bearers of a message of salvation that comes from God and is meant for the whole world. It is not a word based on mere human authority; rather, it possesses an authority that comes directly from God. This is what St Paul tells us in the second reading this Sunday: *"When you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers"* (1 Thes 2: 13).

Be mindful of the great treasure of the Word of God entrusted in its entirety to the Church and to each individual believer. Let yourselves be evangelized by the Word of Christ, to become in turn evangelizers for your brothers and sisters.

May Mary, Star of evangelization, who was the first to welcome humbly into her womb the Word of God in order to offer him to the whole world, make us attentive listeners to the Word and courageous witnesses of her Son, Jesus, the only Master and Saviour of the world.

Amen!