



The Holy See

***URBI ET ORBI MESSAGE
OF HIS HOLINESS POPE JOHN PAUL II
CHRISTMAS 2000***

1. "*The first man Adam became a living being; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit*" (*1 Cor 15:45*).

These are the words of the Apostle Paul, which sum up the mystery of humanity redeemed by Christ. A mystery hidden in God's eternal plan; a mystery which, in a certain way, became history with the incarnation of the Eternal Word of the Father; a mystery which the Church re-lives with profound emotion during this Christmas of the Year 2000, the Year of the Great Jubilee.

Adam, the first "living man", Christ, "a life-giving spirit": the words of the Apostle help us to look more deeply, to recognize in the Child born in Bethlehem the Lamb once slain, who unveils the meaning of history (cf. *Rev 5:7-9*). At his Birth time and eternity met: God in man and man in God.

2. "*The first man Adam became a living being*". The immortal genius of Michelangelo portrayed on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel the moment when God the Father communicated the gift of life to the first man

and made him "a living being".

Between the finger of God and the finger of man
stretching out to each other and almost touching,
there seems to leap an invisible spark:

God communicates to man a tremor of his own life,
creating him in his own image and likeness.

That divine breath is the origin
of the unique dignity of every human being,
of humanity's boundless yearning for the infinite.

It is to that instant of impenetrable mystery,
the beginning of human life on earth,
that our thoughts turn today,
as we contemplate the Son of God
who becomes the son of man,
the eternal face of God
reflected in the face of a Child.

3. "The first man Adam became a living being."

Because of the divine spark placed within him,
man is a being endowed with intelligence and freedom,
and thus capable of deciding responsibly
regarding himself and his own destiny.

The great fresco of the Sistine Chapel continues
with the scene of original sin:
the serpent, wrapped round the tree,
persuades our first parents to eat its forbidden fruit.

The genius of art and the intensity of the biblical symbolism
are perfectly wedded in order to evoke
that tragic moment, the beginning for humanity
of a history of rebellion, sin and sorrow.

But could God forget the work of his hands,
the masterpiece of creation?

We know faith's answer:

*"When the time had fully come,
God sent forth his Son, born of woman,
born under the law,
to redeem those who were under the law,
so that we might receive adoption as sons"* (Gal 4:4-5).

These words of the Apostle Paul
ring out with particular eloquence
as we contemplate the wondrous event of Christmas,

in the Year of the Great Jubilee.

In the Newborn Child, laid in the manger,
we greet the "new Adam"
who became for us "a life-giving spirit".

The whole history of the world tends towards him,
born in Bethlehem in order to restore hope
to every man and woman on the face of the earth.

4. From the manger, our gaze today takes in all humanity,
called to receive the grace of the "second Adam",
yet still heir to the sin of the "first Adam".

Is it not this first "No" to God,
repeated in every human sin,
which continues to mar the face of humanity?

Children subjected to violence, humiliated and abandoned,
women raped and exploited,
young people, adults and the elderly marginalized,
endless streams of exiles and refugees,
violence and conflict in so many parts of the world.

I am thinking with great concern of the Holy Land
where violence continues to stain with blood
the difficult path to peace.

And what are we to say about countries

- I am thinking particularly of Indonesia -
where our brothers and sisters in faith, even on this Christmas day,
are undergoing a tragic time of trial and suffering?

We cannot but recall today
that shadows of death threaten
people's lives at every stage of life,
and are especially menacing
at its earliest beginning and its natural end.

The temptation is becoming ever stronger
to take possession of death by anticipating its arrival,
as though we were masters of our own lives or the lives of others.

We are faced by alarming signs
of the "culture of death",
which pose a serious threat for the future.

5. Yet however dense the darkness may appear,
our hope for the triumph of the Light which appeared
on this Holy Night at Bethlehem is stronger still.

So much good is being done, silently,
 by men and women who daily live their faith,
 their work, their dedication
 to their families and to the good of society.
 Encouraging too are the efforts of all those,
 including men and women in public life, striving
 to foster respect for the human rights of every person,
 and the growth of solidarity between peoples of different cultures,
 so that the debt of the poorest countries will be condoned
 and honourable peace agreements reached
 between nations engaged in tragic conflicts.

6. To peoples in all parts of the world
 who are moving with courage towards the values of democracy,
 freedom, respect and mutual acceptance,
 and to all persons of good will, whatever their culture,
 the joyful message of Christmas is today addressed:
"Peace on earth to those on whom God's favour rests" (cf. Lk 2:14).
 Of humanity as it approaches the new millennium,
 You, Lord Jesus, born for us at Bethlehem
 ask respect for every person,
 especially the small and the weak;
 you ask for an end to all forms of violence!
 To wars, oppression, and all attacks on life!
 O Christ, whom we look on today
 in the arms of Mary,
 you are the reason for our hope!
 Saint Paul tells us:
*"The old has passed away,
 behold, the new has come!"* (2 Cor 5:17).
 In you, only in you, is humanity offered
 the chance to become "a new creation".
 Thank you, Child Jesus, for this your gift!

Happy Christmas to all!