



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Wednesday 23 December 1998

1. "Come, Emmanuel, God's presence among us, our King, our Judge: save us, Lord our God!". Thus the liturgy invites us to invoke the Lord today, two days before Holy Christmas, as Advent now approaches its end. In these weeks we have relived Israel's expectation, witnessed in so many pages of the Prophets: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined" (Is 9:1-2). Through the Incarnation of the Word, the Creator sealed the agreement of an eternal Covenant: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16). How can we not be grateful to the Father who gives his own Son, his beloved Son with whom he is well pleased (cf. Mt 3:17), placing in a creature's small womb the one whom the whole universe cannot contain?

2. In the silence of the Holy Night, the mystery of Mary's divine motherhood reveals the radiant and welcoming face of the Father. His features of tender concern for the poor and sinners are already visible in the defenceless Child in the cave who lies in the arms of his Virgin Mother. Dear brothers and sisters, I express my fervent wishes for a happy and holy Christmas for each one of you and for your loved ones. May the light of the Redeemer who comes to reveal the Father's tender and merciful face shine in the life of all believers and bring the gift of divine peace to the world.

To the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors the Holy Father said:

Dear Brothers and Sisters, As the Holy Night of Christmas approaches, I pray that the angels' song of peace and goodwill may find a response in the hearts of men and women everywhere. I extend a special greeting to the students from St Paul Seminary in Minnesota and their families. Upon all the English-speaking pilgrims, especially those from Japan and the United States, I invoke an abundance of grace and joy in the newborn Lord. Happy Christmas to everyone and a

Blessed New Year!

After his catechesis the Holy Father addressed the Poles in attendance

Dear Compatriots,

1. I extend my cordial welcome to all of you who are present at this Audience, which is also our traditional Christmas Eve meeting. At this time I also join in spirit my compatriots in our homeland and throughout the world. I thank all those who are taking part in this meeting and with my prayer I embrace our entire homeland.

2. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son" (Jn 3:16). Let us pause for a moment in meditation on these words of St John's Gospel. Indeed, they do not only speak of God's boundless love for man, but also of the greatness and dignity of man himself. The generosity of God, manifested from the beginning of creation, reaches its summit in Jesus Christ. God became man and was born of the Virgin, defenceless, wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger, because there was no room for him in a human dwelling. "He emptied himself", as St Paul wrote, "taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men" (Phil 2:7). We will never fully understand this mystery of extreme humility. In this event, which we know so well from the Gospel, God entered the history of man to remain with him until the end. For 2,000 years, the great message of love and reconciliation from Bethlehem has been spreading throughout the world.

3. The birth of the Son of God also shows us the profound truth about man. Precisely in Christ man discovers his own most high calling. If God so loved the world as to give his only Son, he did so that we might have "eternal life", that we might no longer walk in darkness, but receive the light. How well this is summarized by our Polish Christmas carol: "From on high God came down to earth to lead the human race to heaven". By coming to the world in poverty, he wished to bestow on us his wealth and made us children of God. He took on human nature to become like us, to unite himself in a way with every person and truly become one of us (cf. *Gaudium et spes*, n. 22).

4. Tomorrow, Christmas Eve, we will break the Christmas wafers with our loved ones. May this beautiful custom bring us closer to each other and open our hearts. In breaking the Christmas wafer, bread that is a gift of God and the work of human hands, let us open ourselves to one another, let us open ourselves wide to every other person, especially those who are alone, forgotten or destitute and perhaps in misery, those who are homeless or out of work. May this meal on Christmas Eve become a true "feast of love".

Let us fix our gaze on the Divine Child, Saviour of the world; from him let us learn love, goodness and sensitivity. Let us learn to be responsible for the destiny of every person and every human life. This is my wish on the threshold of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 for those who are present here together with Archbishop Szczepan Wesoly, for His Excellency the Ambassador of the

Republic of Poland to the Holy See and for all my compatriots throughout the world. With these wishes I also embrace the whole Church in Poland, the Bishops together with the Cardinal Primate, priests, consecrated persons, parishes, Dioceses, everyone - excluding no one. I would like my wishes to reach every home and every family, all people of goodwill.