



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT TO THE ROMAN PARISH OF *SAN BONAVENTURA*

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

1 April 1979

"Sir, we wish to see Jesus" (Jn 12:21).

1. This is what the people who had come to Jerusalem from various parts said to Philip, who was from Bethsaida. When people from the various parts of Italy arrived here, in this place, bordering on great Rome, where until some time ago there was only the country, they seemed to say the same thing: We want to see Christ in our midst! We want him to live with us; we want his house to rise here. We hardly know one another. We want him to make us acquainted with one another, to make us approach one another, so that we will no longer be strangers, but become a community...

This was how the people spoke who had come here from the different parts of Italy. This was how you yourselves spoke, dear parishioners of this young parish of San Bonaventura da Bagnoregio. And such or similar words are still current: they are still heard even now.

Your parish is a very young one. It was born here of your faith, on this ground which was still uncultivated until a short time ago. It was born here of your firm resolution to have Jesus live in your midst.

It was born of the initiative that you manifested before the ecclesiastical authorities, and also before the civil authorities. Thanks to that, this church, which already serves your Christian community, was erected. And the other instruments useful for parish life were set up.

I am well aware that, in spite of the many difficulties encountered, a great deal of work has already been carried out methodically and with abnegation, and that you intend to continue the fine work, developing it according to the lines of a gradual increase which will expand more and more every

day, in order to reach all the needs of this parish family. The Pope follows you in this with his good will and his fatherly care: we wish to see Jesus!

2. With all the greater joy I come to you today as Bishop of Rome, this being my first canonical visit. I am happy to be able to carry it out, today on the fifth Sunday of Lent; but I am also pleased that the Cardinal Vicar of Rome is present and also the Auxiliary Bishop Monsignor Salimei, who will pay a more detailed pastoral visit to your parish this week. I greet all the parishioners cordially. I congratulate you on this good and courageous beginning. I greet your Pastors, the Franciscan Conventual Fathers, whom I have already had the opportunity to meet, obtaining from them information about the essential problems of the life of the parish. I wish to address a word of approval and encouragement to the many groups operating with zeal and dedication in the various sectors of the apostolate, wishing them more and more success and good results in their activity.

I also wish to manifest my deep gratitude and sincere good will to the Carmelite Fathers of the neighbouring Parish of St Mary Regina Mundi, who, in the midst of the serious difficulties that can be imagined, had the merit of beginning the pastoral care in this area which was becoming more and more populated.

3. And now allow me to refer again to the liturgical readings of this Sunday. The prophet Jeremiah speaks in the first reading of the covenant which God wishes to make, once more, with the house of Israel. Since the people of Israel had not kept the preceding covenant, God wishes to make another one, a stronger and more interior one. "I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jer 31:33).

Dear Brothers and Sisters! God has concluded with us the new and at the same time definitive covenant in Jesus Christ, who, as St Paul says today, "becomes the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him" (Heb 5:9).

This Covenant is based on the Son's perfect obedience to the Father. By virtue of this obedience, Christ "was heard" (Heb 5:7) and is always heard. He maintains uninterruptedly this union of man with God, which was established on his cross. The Church—as the Council states—"is a sacrament or sign and instrument of deep union with God and of the unity of the whole of mankind" (*Lumen Gentium*, 1).

You who have formed here a living particle of the Church, that is, your Parish, have expressed in a particular way this covenant with God, in which you wish to persevere with the grace of Jesus Christ.

If some one were to ask you why you did so, you could answer in this way, as the Prophet says today: we wish that he should be our God and that we should be his People; we want his laws to be written on our hearts. You are looking for a support for these hearts of yours and for your

consciences.

You are looking for a support for your families. You want them to be stable, not to break up; you want them to form those living hearths of love by which man can warm himself every day. Persevering in the sacramental marriage bond, you wish to hand down life to your children, and, together with life, human and Christian education. Each of you, dear parents, feels deeply this great responsibility which is bound to the dignity of the father and of the mother. You know that your own salvation, and the salvation of your children, depends on that. How am I playing the father's part? What kind of a mother am I? These are the questions that you ask yourselves more than once. You rejoice, and I with you, at all good that is manifested in you, in your families, in your children. I take pleasure with you in their progress at school, in the development of their young consciences. You want them to become really "men". And this, to a large extent, depends on what they acquire in their parents' house. No one can replace you in this work. Society, the nation, the Church, are constructed on the foundations laid by you.

I look at these children of yours, the youth of your parish. They are present in large numbers here. This parish is young, really young. How many hopes children and the young put in life! And how much hope we have in them!

Just for this reason, we must firmly base our whole life, and above all family life, on Jesus Christ. Because he, who "became the source of eternal salvation to all..." (Heb 5:9), indicates to us every day the ways of this salvation. With word and example he teaches us how we must live. He shows us what is the deep and ultimate meaning of human life.

And if man becomes sure of this meaning of life, then all problems, even ordinary everyday ones, are solved according to it. Life develops, then, at the same time, on the human and divine plane.

Today we hear the Lord Jesus announcing his death. This is already the fifth Sunday of Lent; we have drawn much nearer to Holy Week, to the Sacred Triduum which will again recall to us particularly his passion, death, and resurrection. Therefore the words with which the Lord announces his end, now near, speak of glory: "The hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified... Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say?... Father, glorify thy name." (Jn 12:23, 27-28). And finally he utters the words which express so deeply the mystery of his redeeming death: "Now is the judgment of this world... And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." (Jn 12:31-32). That lifting up of Christ from the earth is prior to his elevation in glory: lifting up on the wood of the cross, lifting up in martyrdom, lifting up in death.

Jesus announces his death also in these mysterious words: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." (Jn 12:24). His death is the pledge of life, it is the source of life for us all. The eternal Father preordained this death in the order of grace and salvation, just as, in the order of nature, the death

of the grain of wheat under the earth is established so that there may spring from it the ear bearing abundant fruit. Man is then nourished by this fruit, which becomes daily bread. Also the sacrifice which was accomplished in the death of Christ became food for our souls under the appearances of bread.

Let us prepare to live Holy Week, the Sacred Triduum, the Death and the Resurrection. Let us accept this life, the spring of which is his Sacrifice. Let us live this life nourishing ourselves with the food of the Body and the Blood of the Redeemer, let us grow in it to reach eternal life.

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