



The Holy See

SOLEMNITY OF MARY MOTHER OF GOD

HOMILY OF POPE JOHN PAUL II

World Day of Peace

Wednesday, 1 January 1997

1. “*And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus*” (Lk 1:31). Jesus means “*God who saves*”.

Jesus, the name given by God himself, means: “There is salvation in no one else” (Acts 4:12) except in Jesus of Nazareth, born of the Virgin Mary. In him God became man, thus reaching out to every human being.

“In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son” (Heb 1:1-2). This Son is the eternal Word, one in substance with the Father, made man to *reveal the Father to us, and to enable us to understand the whole truth about ourselves*. He spoke to us with human words, and with his deeds and his life itself, from his birth to his death on the Cross and to his Resurrection.

From the very beginning all this *gives rise to wonder*. Already the shepherds who went to Bethlehem marveled at what they had seen, and the others wondered at what the shepherds told them about the newborn Babe (cf. Lk 2:18). Guided by the intuition of faith, they recognized the Messiah in the Child lying in the manger, and the humble birth in Bethlehem of the Son of God spurred them joyously to proclaim the glory of the Most High.

2. From the start the name Jesus belonged to the One who was called thus on the eighth day after his birth. In a certain sense, on coming into the world he brought with him this name which admirably expresses *the essence and mission of the Incarnate Word*.

He came into the world to save humanity. Therefore when he was given this name, who he was and what was to be his mission were revealed at the same time. Many in Israel were called by this name, but he bore it uniquely, totally fulfilling its meaning: Jesus of Nazareth, Saviour of the world.

3. St Paul, as we heard in the second reading, writes: “When the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law ... so that we might receive adoption as sons” (Gal 4:4-5). From the very beginning time was joined to the name of Jesus. This name accompanies him in his earthly life immersed in time, but without his being subject to it, *since in him is the fullness of time*. Indeed, God brought fullness to human time *by entering with it into man’s history*. He did not enter as an abstract concept. He entered as a Father who gives life — a new life, divine life — to his adoptive children. By the work of Jesus Christ, we can all share in the divine life: children in the Son, destined to the glory of eternity.

St Paul then goes more deeply into this truth: “And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’” (Gal 4:6). In us, human beings, the divine sonship comes from Christ and is brought about by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit comes *to teach us that we are children* and at the same time *to make this divine sonship effective in us*. The Son is he *who with all his being says to God: “Abba! Father!”*.

Here we are touching on the culminating point of the mystery of our Christian life. In fact, the name “Christian” indicates a new way of being, *to be in the likeness of the Son of God*. As sons in the Son, we share in salvation, which is not only the deliverance from evil, but is first of all the fullness of good: of the supreme good of the son-ship of God. And it is the Spirit of God who renews the face of the earth (cf. Ps 103 [104]:30). On the first day of the new year, the Church invites us to become ever more deeply aware of this. She invites us to consider human time in this light.

4. Today’s liturgy celebrates the solemnity of the Mother of God. Mary is the one who was chosen to be Mother of the Redeemer, sharing intimately in his mission. In the light of Christmas, the mystery of her divine motherhood is illumined. Mary, Mother of Jesus who was born in the Bethlehem cave, is also the Mother of every man and woman who comes into the world. How is it possible not to commend to her the year that is beginning, to implore a time of serenity and peace for all humanity? On the day when this new year begins under the blessed gaze of the Mother of God, let us invoke the gift of peace for each one and all.

5. In fact, for several years now, on the initiative of my Predecessor, Pope Paul VI, 1 January has been celebrated as *World Day of Peace*. Here we are in the Vatican Basilica this year also, to implore the gift of peace for the nations of the whole world.

The presence of the distinguished ambassadors to the Holy See, whom I greet respectfully, is significant in this perspective. I also affectionately greet the President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Cardinal Roger Etchegaray, and all his co-workers, as I thank them for the

valuable contribution they make to spreading the message of peace which the Church never tires of repeating.

This year the theme of the Message for this Day is “*Offer forgiveness and receive peace*”. How necessary forgiveness is if peace is to spring forth in the heart of every believer and every person of goodwill! The dual words of peace and forgiveness are as it were inseparable. Every person of goodwill, keen to work tirelessly to build the civilization of love, must make this invitation his own: *offer forgiveness, receive peace*.

6. The Church prays and strives for peace in every dimension: for the peace of consciences, for the peace of families, for peace among the nations. She is concerned for peace in the world since she is aware that only through peace can the great community of men develop authentically.

Drawing towards the end of this century in which the world, and especially Europe, have experienced many wars and much suffering, how we long for the threshold of the year 2000 to be crossed by all men and women under the banner of peace! For this reason, thinking of humanity called to live another year of grace, let us repeat with Moses the words of the Old Covenant: “The Lord bless you and keep you: The Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you: The Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace” (Nm 6:24-26). In addition, let us repeat with faith and hope the Apostle’s words: “Christ is our peace!” (cf. Eph 2:14). Let us trust in the Lord’s help and in the motherly protection of Mary, Queen of Peace. Let us put our hope in Jesus, the name of salvation given to men and women of every language and race. Confessing his name, let us walk trustfully toward the future, certain that we will not be disappointed if we trust in the most holy Name of Jesus.

*In te Domine speravi,
non confundar in aeternum.*

Amen!