



The Holy See

VISIT TO THE PARISH OF ST ROSE OF VITERBO IN ROME

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Second Sunday of Advent, 6 December 1998

1. "*Prepare the way of the Lord*" (Mt 3:3). These words, taken from the book of the prophet Isaiah (cf. Is 40:3), are spoken by John the Baptist, whom Jesus himself once described as the greatest among those born of woman (cf. Mt 11:11). The Evangelist Matthew presents him as the Precursor, the one who received the mission of "preparing the way" for the Messiah.

His insistent invitation to repentance and conversion continues to resound in the world and urges believers, on their pilgrimage to the Jubilee of the Year 2000, to welcome worthily the Lord who comes. The third year of immediate preparation for the Jubilee has just begun and our spiritual journey must gain momentum.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us prepare to meet Christ! Let us prepare the way for him in our hearts and in our communities. The figure of the Baptist, who is simply clad and lives on locusts and wild honey, is a powerful call to be watchful and to look for the Saviour's coming.

2. "*There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse*" (Is 11:1). During the season of Advent, the liturgy highlights another great figure: the prophet Isaiah, who kept alive the hopeful expectation of the entire chosen people for the coming of the promised Saviour. As we heard in the first reading, Isaiah describes the Messiah as a shoot that springs from the ancient stump of Jesse. On him the Spirit of God will rest in its fullness, and his kingdom will be characterized by the reestablishment of justice and the consolidation of universal peace.

We too need to renew this trusting expectation of the Lord. Let us listen to the prophet's words. They invite us to look with hope to the definitive foundation of the kingdom of God, which he describes with highly poetic images that can shed light on the triumph of justice and peace to be brought about by the Messiah. "*The wolf shall dwell with the lamb ... the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them*" (Is 11:6). These are symbolic expressions which anticipate the reality of universal reconciliation. We are all called to collaborate in this work of cosmic renewal, sustained

by the certainty that one day all creation will be completely subject to the universal lordship of Christ.

3. Let us welcome with joy the message that today's liturgy communicates to us! Dear brothers and sisters of the Parish of St Rose of Viterbo, I greet you all with great affection. I greet the Cardinal Vicar, the Auxiliary Bishop of the sector, your parish priest, Fr Maurizio Vismara, and the priests who work with him, members of the Congregation of Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Bétharram. I extend a cordial thought to Fr Pierino Donini, who was your parish priest for 35 years. I also greet the members of the recently established pastoral council and all who, in one way or another, are involved in the groups that enliven parish life.

Your community, which numbers about 10,000 souls, waited a long time for a suitable and definitive place to hold liturgical celebrations and pastoral activities. I rejoice with you today because at last you have a beautiful church, thanks to the generosity of the Sisters, Daughters of the Cross. In expressing to these dear religious sincere appreciation in the name of the Diocese for their previous hospitality to the parish and their generous donation a few years ago, I wish them a fruitful apostolate in the school, following the shining example of their holy founders, André Hubert Fournet and Jeanne Élizabeth Bichier des Ages.

I greet the superiors and students of the Scots College, which is based in the territory of the parish, as well as the Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother who run the nursery school and the "Ancilla Domini" nursery.

I would like to address a special thought to the personnel, teachers and pupils of the Catholic schools present in the area. My thanks go to all those who work in them, for their daily commitment and for the educational enthusiasm with which they follow their pupils, in close collaboration with the families. The educational project and specific identity inspired by the Gospel make the *Catholic school* a real educational community, open to acceptance and interreligious and intercultural dialogue among all students, for their full human, spiritual and social development.

4. Dear brothers and sisters, in coming to visit you, I have been able to note the fruits that through the City Mission the grace of the Lord is producing in your community. I thank God for the good results of this great apostolic initiative proposed to the city. This year the Mission involves the areas of life and work and, within this parish, there are important work centres.

I am also aware that in this neighbourhood the population in general is characterized by quite a high social and economic level. While I hope that this comfortable life-style will be an incentive to a more widely shared solidarity, I invite all the parishioners to become more involved in the mission. The proclamation of the Gospel must be taken wherever man works, suffers, studies and rests. Every environment is important for evangelization, so closely connected with man's overall development. Christ must be proclaimed everywhere! It is only in this way that the Christian community can effectively prepare for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000.

5. "*Welcome one another ... as Christ has welcomed you*" (Rom 15:7). In pointing out to us the profound meaning of Advent, St Paul emphasizes the need for acceptance and brotherhood in every family and community. To welcome Christ and open our hearts to our brothers: this is our daily task, to which the spiritual climate of this liturgical season spurs us.

The Apostle continues: "*May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (Rom 15:5-6). May Advent and the approaching celebration of the birth of Jesus strengthen this sense of unity and communion in every believer.

May Mary, the Virgin of listening and acceptance, accompany us during Advent, and guide us to be credible and generous witnesses to the saving love of God.

Amen!

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