



# The Holy See

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PASTORAL VISIT TO THE PARISH  
OF THE INFANT JESUS IN SACCOPASTORE, ROME

## *HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II*

*Sunday, 8 February 1998*

1. *“Do not be afraid; henceforth you will be catching men”* (Lk 5:10). Today's Gospel passage tells us about the vocation of Simon Peter and of the first Apostles. After speaking to the crowd from Simon's boat, Jesus asks them to put out into the deep for a catch. Peter replies by explaining his difficulties during the previous night when, despite his efforts, he was unable to catch anything. Nevertheless he trusts the Lord and makes his first act of faith in him: “At your word, I will let down the nets” (Lk 5:5).

The subsequent wonder of the miraculous catch is an eloquent sign of Jesus' divine power and, at the same time, foretells the mission that will be entrusted to the Fisherman of Galilee, of steering the ship of the Church over the billows of history, and, with the power of the Gospel, of gathering an immense multitude of men and women from every part of the globe.

The call of Peter and the first Apostles is the work of God's free initiative, which is answered by man's free adherence to him. This loving dialogue with the Lord helps the human being to become aware of his limitations and, at the same time, of the power of God's grace, which purifies and renews the mind and heart: “Do not be afraid; henceforth you will be catching men”. The ultimate success of the mission is guaranteed by divine assistance. It is God who brings everything to fulfilment. We are asked to trust in him and to comply docilely with his will.

2. *Do not be afraid!* How many times does the Lord repeat this invitation to us. Today especially, in an age marked by powerful fears and uncertainties, these words resound as an exhortation to entrust ourselves to God, to turn our gaze towards him. He, who directs the fate of history by the power of his Spirit, does not abandon us in trial and makes our steps firm in faith.

Dear brothers and sisters, let this deep awareness pervade your life. God calls every believer to follow him; he asks him

to co-operate in his saving plan. Like Simon Peter, we too can proclaim: "At your word I will let down the nets". At your word! His word is the Gospel, the perennial message of salvation, which transforms life when it is accepted and lived. On the day of our Baptism these "glad tidings" were communicated to us, and we must ponder them deeply and witness to them with courage.

The *City Mission*, now in its essential phase, asks all Christians to proclaim the Gospel in word, but especially with integrity of life. In this extraordinary apostolic undertaking, consider yourselves as continually sustained by the One who is the first missionary sent by the Father into the world: Jesus Christ, our Lord.

3. Dear brothers and sisters of Infant Jesus Parish in Saccopastore, I am delighted to be with you today, and to visit your lovely Church! I extend my affectionate greetings to you all: to the Cardinal Vicar, to the Auxiliary Bishop of this area, to your young parish priest, Fr Antonino De Siati, and to the priests who work with him, to the Sisters of Charity of St Joan Antide, who are closely involved in parish activities and offer their generous service to the community's many elderly and sick. I also greet those who participate more directly in parish life and in the many formation, service and apostolic groups, with a special thought for the individuals and families of Filipino descent who for some time have been meeting here every week for the Sunday liturgical celebration.

I know that there are many elderly people in your community. I extend my affectionate greetings particularly to them and to all Rome's elderly, together with a cordial invitation to pray constantly and confidently for their own needs and for the success of the City Mission. May your witness of faith, dear brothers and sisters, be an example to everyone, but especially to young people, of how to welcome Christ into one's life.

I am delighted with the religious and lay collaborators over the *charitable and social programmes* they have organized in the parish. The concrete solidarity you show to those in need both in your neighbourhood and far from here does you honour. I am referring to the many charitable activities you conduct, such as the support of a leprosarium in Central Africa, aid to the people stricken by the earthquake in Central Italy and twinning with the Lido dei Pini Institute. Continue your efforts in the spirit of the Word of God who, by his Incarnation, has reached out to everyone and has brought salvation to all.

4. Yours is a large community which has grown up along a bend in the Aniene River, located in the area called Saccopastore. Until 30 years ago, shepherds would come down to this place from the Abruzzi to spend the winter months with their flocks. Later, as families gradually settled here, the liturgy began to be celebrated in a small chapel dedicated to the Infant Jesus, which was the first place of worship and assembly in the area. The name of this chapel, chosen by the people in reference to its inauguration on Christmas Eve 1952, was later passed on to the parish, juridically established in 1957. Various priests worked here with great zeal. Among them I would like to recall the first parish priest, Mons. Giuseppe Simonazzi, whose memory lives on.

Your parish's name refers to the mystery of the Incarnate Word, to God who came to dwell among us in order to save and redeem the whole man and every man: those of the past, the present and future generations. It is the mystery of the assumption of human time into the divine dimension, in itself transcendent and eternal. This is also the meaning of the Jubilee of the Year 2000. Jesus, God-made-man, is the one Saviour. It is to him that we turn our gaze as we approach

the historic goal of the beginning of the third millennium. I urge you to prepare for the Jubilee event with these sentiments.

5. *"Here am I! Send me"* (Is 6:8). The account of Isaiah's vocation, which we heard in the first reading, stresses the prophet's prompt response to the Lord's call. After contemplating God's holiness and becoming aware of the people's infidelity, Isaiah prepared for the important mission of calling the people of Israel back to the great commitments of the Covenant in view of the Messiah's coming.

As it was for the prophet Isaiah, proclaiming salvation particularly involves every believer in rediscovering God's holiness. *Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus*: this acclamation is repeated in every Eucharistic celebration. Anyone who meets a Christian must be able to discern in him, despite inevitable human weaknesses, the holy face of the Most High.

Through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, the dwelling-place of the Holy Spirit, may we be granted the gift of constantly responding to God's call. May we particularly be granted to trust in him in every circumstance, so that in all things we may co-operate with his work of salvation.

Amen!

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