



# The Holy See

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VISIT TO THE ROMAN PARISH  
OF ST THERESA OF THE CHILD JESUS "IN PANFILO" (ROME)

## **HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II**

*Fifth Sunday of Lent, 21 March 1999*

1. *"I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die"* (Jn 11:25-26; cf. Gospel Acclamation).

We can imagine the surprise that such an announcement caused in his listeners, who a short time later, however, were able to see the truth of Jesus' words when, at his command, Lazarus, who had already been in the tomb for four days, came forth alive. An even more striking confirmation of this astonishing statement will be given later by Jesus when, by his own Resurrection, he will win the final victory over evil and death.

What had been foretold many centuries before by the prophet Ezekiel in addressing the Israelites deported to Babylon: "I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live" (Ez 37:14), will become a reality in the paschal mystery and will be presented by the Apostle Paul as the essential core of the new life of believers: *"But you are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit, if the Spirit of God really dwells in you"* (Rom 8:9).

Does this not show the timeliness of the Gospel message? In a society in which signs of death are increasing but in which at the same time a profound need for hope in life is felt, it is the mission of Christians to continue to proclaim Christ, man's "resurrection and life". Yes, faced with the signs of a creeping "culture of death", Jesus' great revelation must still be heard today: *"I am the resurrection and the life"*.

2. Dear Brothers and Sisters of St Theresa of the Child Jesus in Panfilo! I am pleased to be here among you today, as I continue my pastoral visit to the parishes of our Diocese.

I cordially greet the Cardinal Vicar, the Auxiliary Bishop of this area, your parish priest, Fr Francesco Pacini, and the Discalced Carmelite religious who help run the parish. My thoughts turn

next to the women religious, the members of the pastoral council and those belonging to the various parish groups, who perform valuable work in different areas of the parish's pastoral life.

I affectionately greet everyone who lives in this neighbourhood. In particular, I greet the elderly, whom I know are numerous, but also the groups of young families who have recently moved into the area. May the parish, which is called to be an authentic "family of families", be an ever more welcoming community towards them, in order to help them fulfil their vocation in the service of the Gospel.

3. Two days ago we celebrated the Solemnity of St Joseph, husband of the Virgin Mary, guardian of the Redeemer and a worker. At this moment, I would like to remember those who spend a large part of their day working for the various institutions in this neighbourhood: the State Mint, E.N.E.L., the Vittorio Alfieri State Middle School, as well as the many offices and diplomatic legations. I know that, in conjunction with the City Mission, in which you are actively participating (and I am pleased with that), your parish community has become more attentive to the needs of the different situations and is seeking to plan and propose appropriate initiatives of formation and prayer at the best times for those who are involved all day in productive activities.

It is the task of believers to be an active and evangelizing "presence" in the workplace. By meeting in the parish to pray together and to grow in faith, they are then called to become the leaven of spiritual renewal where they work. It is their task to become apostles to their brethren, offering them the Gospel invitation "come and see" (cf. Jn 1:46) and helping them to rediscover Christian values and to live them with greater conviction.

Regarding the City Mission, how can we not entrust its future progress to the patron of this parish, St Theresa of the Child Jesus, whom you affectionately call "Teresina". She deeply lived her missionary zeal within the walls of Carmel, so much so that she was proclaimed patroness of the missions. Together with the City Mission we also entrust to her the missions "ad gentes" of the Diocese of Rome and all the Roman missionaries, who have gone to many parts of the world generously to spread the Gospel seed.

4. The life and spiritual message of St Theresa of the Child Jesus and of the Holy Face, whom I had the joy of proclaiming a doctor of the Church on 19 October 1997, is very eloquent for the Church of our time. I am thinking, for example, of how much she can teach the many faithful who are preparing to come from around the world on pilgrimage to Rome for the Holy Year. Theresa of Lisieux was also a pilgrim to Rome in 1887. This same church preserves among its relics the veil she wore at the papal audience in which she asked and received from Pope Leo XIII permission to enter Carmel at only 15 years of age.

The young Theresa was enthusiastic in her discovery of Rome, the "shrine city", which contains numerous testimonies of holiness and love for Christ. Theresa was also able to express and

synthesize in her mystical experience the very heart of the message connected with the approaching Jubilee: the proclamation of the mercy of God the Father and the invitation to entrust ourselves totally to him, who reaches out to everyone and wishes to save everyone through the Cross of Christ.

5. St Theresa also reminds us of the enthusiasm and generosity of the young. Her constant trust in the merciful love of God made her youth happier and more shining. Dear young people of this parish and young people of the entire Diocese, whom I will have the joy of meeting in the Vatican next Thursday, I hope that you will achieve the holiness and simplicity of heart of the "young" Theresa, so that you may experience her trust in the merciful providence of God. Is it not young people in particular who feel the strongest need to be welcomed, loved and forgiven? Dear young people, I wish to remind you that only in God will we find the spring that quenches every thirst for love and truth in our hearts. I hope that you will experience the beauty of this divine love and live it in your daily lives.

Dear parishioners, in coming here, I was wondering why in the title of your parish the name of St Theresa of the Child Jesus is followed by the expression "in Panfilo". It is because - as you know so well - under the high altar is the tomb of St Pamphilus, a Roman martyr of the third century. This revered tomb is part of an extensive network of underground cemeteries and Christian monuments of rare beauty. May the testimony of St Pamphilus and the many martyrs of the Church of Rome spur and encourage us to bear a courageous witness of fidelity to Christ.

6. Let us repeat with the Evangelist: "*Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, he who is coming into the world*" (Jn 11:27).

Like Martha, Lazarus' sister, today we too wish to renew our faith in Jesus and our friendship with him. By his Death and Resurrection we are given the fullness of life in the Holy Spirit. It is the divine life that can transform our existence into a gift of love for God and for our brothers and sisters.

May St Theresa of the Child Jesus and St Pamphilus help us by their example and intercession, so that, just as we prayed at the beginning of the Eucharistic celebration, we may "*be like Christ your Son, who loved the world and died for our salvation*" (Collect).

Amen!