



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT TO THE ISLAND OF ISCHIA

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Sunday, 5 May 2002

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. *"In your hearts, reverence Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to make a defence to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you" (I Pt 3,15).*

With these words of the Apostle Peter, I would like to greet you, dear brothers and sisters of Ischia. Thank you for your very warm welcome!

I first greet your beloved Pastor, Bishop Filippo Strofaldi, and thank him for his welcome in your name. I also greet cordially the Cardinal of Naples, the Bishops of Campania and the other Bishops present, the priests, the men and women religious and all those who make up the diocesan family.

I greet respectfully the representatives of the Italian Government, as well as the representatives of the Municipality, of the Province of Naples and of the Region of Campania. I also greet the other political and military authorities who have wished to honour our meeting with their presence. I thank everyone who generously helped to prepare for my visit.

Lastly, inhabitants of the island, I embrace you all with a special word for the elderly, the sick, your babies, families and last but not least, those who for various reasons were unable to be with us today.

2. Dear brothers and sisters, may I address to your beloved community *three important words* from the biblical readings just proclaimed.

The first is "listen!". We find it in the moving account of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles where it is told how "the multitudes with one accord listened to what was said by Philip, when they heard him and saw the signs which he did" (Acts 8,6). Listening to this witness of Jesus, who speaks of him with love and enthusiasm, produces the immediate fruit, joy. St Luke notes: "There was great rejoicing in that city" (Acts 8,8).

Christian community of Ischia, if you too want to experience this joy, listen to the Word of God! Thus you will fulfill your mission, guided by the action of the Holy Spirit. You will spread the Gospel of joy and peace, remaining united with your Bishop and the priests who are his first collaborators.

As happened for the communities of Samaria, spoken of in the first reading, the abundant outpouring of the Consoler will come down on you, he who, as the Vatican Council recalls, "moves the heart and converts it to God, opens the eyes of the mind and "makes it easy for all to accept and believe the truth" (Constitution *Dei Verbum*, n. 5).

3. Dear brothers and sisters, the *second word* I would like to address to you is "*welcome!*". Your splendid island, the goal of great numbers of visitors and tourists, knows well the *value of hospitality*. So Ischia can also become *a privileged laboratory of that kind of hospitality* that Christ's disciples are called to offer to all, whatever their country or culture. Only those who have opened their hearts to Christ can offer a hospitality that is never formal or superficial, but identified by "gentleness" and "reverence" (cf. I Pt 3,15).

Faith accompanied by good works is contagious and spreads light, for it makes visible and communicates God's love. Strive to make this lifestyle your own, listening to the Apostle Peter's words just proclaimed in the second reading (cf. I Pt 3,15). He urges believers always to answer with great readiness "*to anyone who asks you to account for the hope that is in you*", and adds "*it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil*" (I Pt 3,17).

4. What human wisdom and what spiritual riches in these simple but fundamental ascetical and pastoral counsels. They lead to the *third word* that I would like to entrust to you: "*love!*".

Listening and welcoming open the heart to love. The Gospel passage from John which has just been read out will help us better to understand this mysterious reality. It shows us how love is the *complete fulfilment of the person's vocation*, according to the plan of God. This love is the great gift of Jesus that makes us truly and fully human. "*He who has my commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves me; and he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him*" (Jn 14,21).

When we feel loved, we ourselves are more disposed to love. When we experience God's love, we are readier to follow the One who loved his disciples "*to the end*" (Jn 13,1), that is, to the point of the total gift of himself.

It is this love that humanity needs, today perhaps more than ever, because *love alone is credible*. It is the unshakeable faith in this love that in every age inspires thoughts of peace and opens broad horizons of forgiveness and harmony. Of course, it is impossible according to the logic of this world, but everything is possible to those who let themselves be transformed by the grace of Christ's Spirit, poured into our hearts with Baptism (cf. Rom 5,5).

5. Dear Church who live in Ischia: be docile and obedient to God's word, and you will be a *laboratory of peace and of genuine love*. You will become an ever more hospitable Church, where everyone feels at home. Those who come to visit you will leave refreshed in body, but also re-invigorated in spirit.

Under your Pastor's wise and enlightened guidance, may you be a community that knows how "*to listen*" and a land willing to "*welcome*", a family that makes its best effort to "*love*" everyone in Christ.

I entrust you to the Virgin Mary, Mother of Fair Love, so that she may help you make visible your identity as Christ's Church, a Church of Love.

May your holy Patrons, in whom divine love is made visibly and credibly concrete, always be an example and a help to you!

Dear Church who dwells in Ischia! May the breath of Christ's Spirit urge you forward to the infinite horizons of holiness. Do not be afraid, but put out into the deep with confidence. Advance with confidence. Always. Praised be Jesus Christ.