



# The Holy See

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VISIT TO THE CAPITOLINE HILL,  
THE SEAT OF ROME'S MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS  
POPE JOHN PAUL II***

*Thursday, 15 January 1998*

*Mr. Mayor,  
Councillors of the Municipality of Rome,  
Authorities in attendance,*

1. The first sentiment which naturally flows from my heart at your cordial welcome today is one of deep-felt thanks: thanks to you all for your presence, and thanks especially to the Mayor, who very courteously invited me some time ago to this historic palace, the offices of the Chief Executive of Rome, and has wished to express your feelings, stressing the significance of my visit today.

I too wanted to come up this hill which over the centuries has been the cradle, seat and symbol of the history and mission of Rome. And today here I am, with you at last, to pay homage to this city's reality and vocation. At the beginning of each year I customarily receive the representatives of the Municipal Administration at the Vatican for our exchange of best wishes. Today it is I who have come to visit you, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, to offer you my best wishes for the new year which has just begun and at the same time to continue the friendly conversation which began the very day of my election as Bishop of Rome and has continued in so many meetings with the citizens of Rome and their representatives.

I cannot hide the fact that the magnificent setting of this historic hall, dedicated to Julius Caesar, the Pope's presence at a solemn session of the Municipal Council and the atmosphere created by the approach of the new millennium heighten my feelings and make this meeting even more meaningful: it offers an opportunity for a review of the past and, at the same time, an encouragement to formulate a harmonious plan for future progress.

2. The representatives of the Roman people, the Successor of Peter, the Capitoline: gathered here are the leaders of Rome's particular and unique vocation, who, as the Mayor has recalled, cannot overlook the "interweaving" of these presences. In this place, which vividly recalls the history and glorious deeds of Rome, this morning's meeting has been arranged by the present representatives of her millennial tradition. Civil Rome and Christian Rome do not find themselves in opposition or in competition, but joined together, while respecting their different responsibilities, by their love for this city and by the desire to make its image an example for the whole world.

At this solemn moment, my thoughts turn to the last Pontiffs to visit the Capitoline. Pius IX came just before Rome was annexed to the Italian State, in an age marked by complex and painful events. Paul VI came up this hill on 16 April 1966, after the last session of the Second Vatican Council, to thank the city for the welcome it gave the Council Fathers. On 10 October 1962, the eve of the opening of that Ecumenical Assembly, he had occasion, as Archbishop of Milan, to give an important address here on "*Rome and the Council*", and he initiated a new style of dialogue with the city and its representatives by coming to this place at a moment in history marked by great ferment.

In reviewing the past years and all the rapid changes which have occurred in recent decades, my thoughts naturally turn to divine Providence which, with inscrutable wisdom, guides the sometimes hesitant steps of men and makes fruitful the efforts of people of goodwill. How many changes have marked the city's life! From the capital of the Papal States to the capital of the Italian State; from a city enclosed within the Aurelian Walls to a metropolis of about three million residents; from a homogeneous human milieu to a multiracial community where, in addition to the Catholic view of life, there coexist views inspired by other religious creeds and even by non-religious concepts of existence.

The human face of the city is deeply changed. The assertion of different cultural and social models and new sensitivities have made coexistence in the city more complex, more open, more cosmopolitan, but also more problematic: together with the obvious positive aspects, there is unfortunately no lack of problems and worries. Next to the lights and signs of hope, shadows are also found on the horizon of a city also called to be a beacon of civilization in the next millennium, a "disciple of truth" (Leo the Great, *Tract. septem et nonaginta*), and a "welcoming mother of peoples" (Prudentius, *Peristephanon, carmen 11, 191*).

3. I spoke just now of the fruitful relationship between the Bishop of Rome and his people, whose intensity has never been diminished by the changing social, political and religious situations. On the contrary, some events such as the decline of the temporal power, the signing of the Lateran Treaties, the tragic experience of the war and the new season encouraged by the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council have made this relationship even more cordial and dynamic.

Today's visit marks a further stage in this common history. In view of the changes which have

involved and continue to involve the city, I would also like to repeat and confirm the words filled with truth and humanity spoken here by my venerable Predecessor, Paul VI: "Our love has never failed ... our love has grown!" (Paul VI, *Insegnamenti*, IV, p. 179).

Every day this relationship of esteem and affection increases, and is expressed and reinforced in frequent visits to the parishes and in meetings with the Roman faithful. It is strengthened by the generous and constant concern of the Cardinal Vicar, the Vicegerent, the Auxiliary Bishops, the priests, religious, lay people and all who in various ways are involved in evangelization. I am thinking of the 328 parishes of Rome, found in every neighbourhood and suburb, even if some still lack proper structures. I am thinking of the religious communities, the Catholic schools, nursing homes, the lay associations and movements, the various forms of volunteer work which represent a surprising and comforting resource for our city, where anonymity and loneliness would otherwise be far greater and more painful.

It is a concrete love that wishes to reach out to people, all people, offering them reasons for hope, cultural opportunities, help and support in moral and material difficulties, places where they are welcomed and listened to, opportunities for understanding and brotherhood. It is a love attentive to changing reality, to the toil of daily life, to the moral risks which still endanger this Rome of ours.

4. Precisely in order to tackle the negative phenomena which risk disfiguring Rome's countenance, I called the Christian community together, committing it to instilling greater love in the city with the City Mission for the Holy Year 2000. My hope is that in this way the city may present itself at the the Great Jubilee renewed both inwardly and visibly, and thus show its Christian face to pilgrims as the herald of an age of peace and hope for all humanity.

Rome and the Jubilee: two realities which recall and illumine each other! Rome is reflected in the Jubilee and the Jubilee refers to the reality of Rome. The celebration presents anew the faith in Jesus Christ proclaimed here and witnessed to by the Apostle Peter; it recalls the need to re-establish effective equality of rights among all men, in the light of God's law and justice; it urges the overcoming of divisions and their causes, to establish true communion among all human beings.

With her religious and civil history and her "catholic" dimension, Rome admirably calls these values to mind. She is the See of the Prince of the Apostles and of his Successor; she preserves the memorials of the martyrdom of Sts Peter and Paul; she is known as the home of law and of Latin and Christian civilization; she is appreciated as a city universally open to hospitality. For this rare combination of qualities, Rome is called to live the grace of the Jubilee in an exemplary way.

It is certainly the task of Christians to renew and purify the face of this Church which "presides over charity", according to the well-known phrase of St Ignatius of Antioch (*Letter to the Romans*, ed. Funk 1901, p. 253), so that she may reflect Christ's light ever more clearly. But Rome's special

relationship with the Jubilee must also make the civil authorities particularly concerned to promote civil harmony and a quality of life worthy of man and of our city's vocation.

On the occasion of today's visit, in addition to giving me a stone from the Flavian Amphitheatre, you have wished to unveil a commemorative plaque in this Council Hall. As I offer you my cordial thanks for your courtesy, I hope that this symbolic act will be the lasting sign of a new era of common commitment to our city's human and civil progress.

5. With my gaze on the Year 2000, I now address you, Rome, whom the Lord has called me to guide on the way of the Gospel, on the threshold of a new millennium!

The Lord has entrusted you, Rome, with the task of being "prima inter Urbes" in the world, a beacon of civilization and faith. Live up to your glorious past, to the Gospel proclaimed to you by the martyrs and saints who made your name great. Open the riches of your heart, Rome, and your millennial history to Christ. Do not be afraid; he does not stifle your freedom and your greatness. He loves you and wants to make you worthy of your civil and religious vocation, so that you will continue to bestow the treasures of faith, culture and humanity on your children and on the people of our time.

By your faith, the eloquent proofs of your charity, the orderly conduct of your daily life, may the pilgrims of the Great Jubilee be helped to believe and to hope in the new civilization of love.

I entrust you, Rome, to the loving protection of Mary, "Salus populi Romani", and to the intercession of your patron saints, Peter and Paul.

Rome, city that fears neither time nor the dynamism of progress; Rome, a crossroads of peace and civilization; Rome, my Rome, I bless you and with you I bless your children and all your good intentions!

*At the end of his address the Holy Father said extemporaneously:*

'Roma' [Rome] read backwards spells "amor" [love]. As a Polish poet said: "If you say 'Roma', you are answered with 'Amor'". That is how it is. That is my last observation and also a good wish for Rome on this most important occasion. Thank you!