



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO HON. FRANCESCO RUTELLI, MAYOR OF ROME
AND THE CITY'S CAPITOLIN ADMINISTRATION**

Saturday, 6 February 1999

Mr Mayor,

Distinguished Representatives of the Capitoline Administration,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. I am pleased to welcome you for our traditional meeting at the beginning of the New Year, and I extend my most cordial wishes to each of you for the demanding task which has been entrusted to you. I greet the Mayor, the members of the Municipal Board and Council and all who in various ways offer their service to the Capitoline Administration.

Your presence today in the Pope's house reminds me of the visit I had the joy of making last 14 January to the Capitoline. Thank you again for that memorable day which you have just mentioned, Mr Mayor. In addressing courteous words to me on everyone's behalf, you also recalled the intentions and proposals of the Municipal Administration, especially for the sake of an orderly preparation appropriate for the Great Jubilee, an extraordinary spiritual and social event.

2. Only a few months remain until the solemn opening of the Holy Door, which will bring us into the Jubilee celebrations of the Year 2000. This is an epochal event which concerns all humanity and whose principal point of gathering and celebration will be Rome. For a long time the Church in the city has been following an intense path of spiritual preparation, in accordance with the guidelines I suggested in the Apostolic Letter *Tertio millennio adveniente*. The *City Mission*, begun a few years ago, is intended to make the Jubilee, which has great significance for believers and non-believers, an intense experience. This is why it intends to address every person, to reach every place and to enter into dialogue with the city's cultural, social and working milieus. In fact, after being addressed in the previous years to families, this year it aims especially at reaching the places where people live and work.

I wrote a *Letter to my brothers and sisters who work in Rome* precisely for this new phase of the City Mission. On this solemn and friendly occasion, I would like to offer you a copy of it, as a sort of anticipation of what the missionaries will be doing almost everywhere in the months to come. I trust that, like its families, Rome's living and working environments will promptly and willingly open their doors to the Lord who knocks at the hearts of all: the Good News of Christ is also and specifically the "*Gospel of work*", which imbues our daily activity with moral strength and renewed vitality.

3. While the spiritual preparation is intensely under way in every parish as, Mr Mayor, you fittingly mentioned, Rome is working to prepare for the Jubilee at the practical and organizational levels. You mentioned all the works that are under way, some of which involve close cooperation between the civil institutions and the Holy See. I express my appreciation of all who are enthusiastically involved in this task, and I am aware of the problems they have to face and solve each day in bringing it to completion. My hope is that the works in progress and those soon to be started can be completed on schedule, to prepare an environment that encourages a worthy celebration of the Holy Year for the benefit of the pilgrims and the city's residents.

How can we not be mindful of the lasting benefits these renovated structures will bring to the city of Rome? Thanks to this effort, the city will be even better equipped to carry out the universal mission Providence has entrusted to it, which goes far beyond the Jubilee deadline. This is why it is important that, during the Jubilee, Rome can once again, in a new and creative way, show her traditional face as an open and hospitable city in which a lofty and perennial spiritual message and the more recent forms of hospitality, organization and communication harmoniously and constructively coexist.

These objectives can, of course, be easily shared by all, with each one remaining within the sphere of his own competence and responsibility. But in order to achieve them, a spirit of active cooperation is required of all.

4. In his intervention, the Mayor stressed the difficulties and problems which hinder the development of our city. I would also like to mention certain concerns which I have particularly at heart.

I am thinking, first of all, of the situation of families and their concrete prospects of life. As in other large cities, here too family ties unfortunately receive less and less support in the overall social context, because of the anonymity and isolation in which so many nuclear families actually find themselves. It is important not to leave them alone to face these conditions which sometimes involve serious and worrisome hardships.

For this reason the Church of Rome has chosen to give priority to the pastoral care of the family, not limiting her attention to those who participate in Church life, but broadening it to include

everyone. I ask you, who have direct responsibilities in the city's government, to spare no efforts to ensure, especially for young families just starting out, the material conditions for healthy family life, beginning with the availability of housing and of programmes to support families and their children's education. Take care, in particular, so that neighbourhoods have sufficient structures for early child care, schools and social services.

5. Another one of my continuing concerns is young people: they are society's future. It is to them that we must dedicate our practical attention. We must have trust in them and help them to have confidence in themselves and in life. All those initiatives in the city which seek to offer the young sufficient room to express that great treasure of newness, hope and good they carry within themselves should therefore be encouraged.

One of the great events planned for the forthcoming Jubilee is *World Youth Day*, which will see young people gathering in Rome from all parts of Italy, Europe and the world. They will certainly be welcomed by their Roman peers, but the whole city is invited to mobilize itself for this extraordinary meeting of young people with Christian Rome and with Rome, teacher of civilization.

6. To speak of youth is naturally to turn one's gaze to the city's future, a future which is already becoming a reality in the growing presence of immigrants, many of whom are in fact young people. Immigration is a serious challenge, but it can also be a great opportunity. In a Rome which leads Italy in the number of immigrants and in the complexity of the problems connected with their presence, the Church is striving to help those in need, regardless of their culture or religion. To this end, she renews her willingness to cooperate constructively with the civil institutions. The objective is not to be satisfied with meeting the primary needs of these brothers and sisters, but to encourage their more stable integration in employment and society. This obviously requires, on the part of the immigrants, respect for the rules of civil society and, by its nature, needs time and appropriate forms.

In view of the Jubilee, the way Rome will practise this hospitality will help to define her civil and spiritual face in the third millennium.

7. Mr Mayor, Administrators of Rome, the problems concerning families, young people and immigrants which I have mentioned are merely examples, although they strongly suggest a more general requirement that can be seen in the city: a demand for high ideals and profound spiritual renewal.

The Church extends her hand to every other religious and cultural group, so that Rome can become the home of brotherhood and peace, and pursue a project of common and shared ideals.

Rome, guardian of the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul, preserves the most outstanding memories and relics of Christianity and is home to the See of Peter's Successor. In encountering

different cultures and religious traditions, Rome is even more inspired today to offer its Christian face and the witness of those Gospel values which have enlivened the path of her age-old history.

May the merciful face of the heavenly Father shine on our city and enlighten those who govern its destiny. This is the wish I cordially express again, as I entrust all your projects and hopes and those of your families and your coworkers to Mary, *Salus Populi Romani*. May my affectionate greetings be conveyed, through you, to the entire people of Rome, whom I remember in my daily prayer and to whom I warmly impart a special Apostolic Blessing.