



The Holy See

VESPERS FOR THE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS OF ROME

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Vatican Basilica

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“Be patient, therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord” (Jas 5:7).

With these words the Apostle James points out to us the inner attitude for preparing ourselves to hear and welcome once again the proclamation of the Redeemer’s birth in the Bethlehem Grotto, an ineffable mystery of light, love and grace. I address my greeting to you with affection, dear university students of Rome whom I have the joy of meeting at this traditional event. I welcome you in the proximity of Holy Christmas with your aspirations, your expectations and your worries; and I also greet the academic communities that you represent. I thank Prof. Massimo Egidi, Rector Magnificent, for his courteous words to me on behalf of you all and in which he has highlighted the sensitive role of the university professor. I greet with warm cordiality Prof. Francesco Profumo, Minister for Education, University and Research, and the academic authorities of the various athenaeums.

Dear friends, St James urges his brethren to imitate the farmer who “waits for the precious fruit of the earth” (Jas 5:7). To you who live in the heart of the cultural and social environment of our time, who are experiencing the new and ever more refined technologies and who are protagonists of a dynamism in history that at times seems overwhelming, the Apostle’s invitation may seem anachronistic or as it were an invitation to leave history, not to want to see the results of your work, of your research. But is this really so? Is God’s invitation to wait really untimely? And we might ask ourselves even more radically: what does Christmas mean for me? Is it really important for my

existence, for building society? There are many people in our time, especially among those you meet in university lecture halls, who voice the question of whether we should await something or someone; whether we should await another messiah, another god; whether it is worth trusting in that Child whom we shall find on Christmas Night in the manger between Mary and Joseph?

The Apostle's exhortation to patient perseverance, which in our time might leave us somewhat perplexed, is in fact the way to accept the question of God in depth, the meaning he has in life and in history, because it is actually by patience, fidelity and constancy in seeking God and openness to him that he reveals his Face. We do not need a generic, indefinite god but rather the living, true God who unfolds the horizon of man's future to a prospect of firm, well-founded hope, a hope rich in eternity that enables us to face the present courageously in all its aspects. Then, however, we should ask ourselves "where can my search find the true Face of this God?". Or better still, "where does God himself come to meet me, showing me his Face, revealing his mystery to me, entering my life?".

Dear friends, St James' invitation: "be patient, therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord", reminds us that the certainty of the world's great hope is given to us, that *we are not alone* and that *we do not* build history *by ourselves*. God is not distant from man but reached down to him and became flesh (Jn 1:14) so that man might understand where the solid foundation of all things, the fulfilment of his deepest yearnings lies: in Christ (cf. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*, n. 10). Patience is a virtue of those who entrust themselves to this presence in history, who do not allow themselves to succumb to the temptation to put all their hope in the immediate, in a purely horizontal perspective or in projects that are technically perfect but far from the most profound reality, the one that gives the human person the loftiest dignity: the transcendent dimension, that of being a creature in the image and likeness of God and of carrying in our heart the desire to rise him.

However, there is another aspect I would like to emphasize this evening. St James has told us: "Behold, the farmer waits [for the precious fruit of the earth] being patient over it" (5:7). God, in the Incarnation of the Word, in the incarnation of his Son, experienced the time of human beings, their growth, their action in history. That Child is the sign of the patience of God who is first patient, constant and faithful to his love for us; he is the true "farmer" of history who knows how to wait. How often have men and women tried to build the world by themselves, without or in opposition to God! The result is marked by the drama of ideologies which, in the end, have proven to be against man and his profound dignity. Patient perseverance in building history, both at the personal and community levels, is not identified with the traditional virtue of prudence — which one certainly needs — but is something greater and more complex. Being persevering and patient means learning to build history together with God, because it is only by building on him and with him that the construction is firmly founded, not exploited for ideological ends but truly worthy of the human being.

This evening, therefore, let us rekindle an even brighter hope in our hearts, because the word of God reminds us that the coming of the Lord is at hand, indeed, that the Lord is with us and that we can build with him. In the Bethlehem Grotto human loneliness is overcome, our existence is no longer left to the impersonal forces of natural and historical processes, our house can be built on the rock: we can plan our history, the history of humanity, not in Utopia but in the certainty that the God of Jesus Christ is present and goes with us.

Dear university friends, let us run joyfully towards Bethlehem, let us welcome in our arms the Child that Mary and Joseph will present to us. Let us start out from him and with him, facing all the difficulties. The Lord asks each one of you to cooperate in building the city of man, seriously and enthusiastically conjugating faith and culture. For this reason I invite you to seek always, with patient perseverance, the true Face of God, helped by the pastoral journey that is proposed to you during this academic year. Seeking the Face of God is the profound aspiration of our heart and is also the answer to the fundamental question that continues to surface ever anew in contemporary society. Dear university friends, you know that the Church of Rome is close to you, with the wise and caring guidance of the Cardinal Vicar and of your chaplains. Let us thank the Lord because, as has been mentioned, 20 years ago [Bl. John Paul II](#) set up the Office for University Ministry at the service of the academic community of Rome. The work it has done has encouraged the creation and development of chaplaincies and has reached the point of being a well-organized network, where the formative proposals of the different athenaeums — of the State, private, Catholic and Pontifical — can contribute to elaborating a culture at the service of the human person's integral growth. At the end of this Liturgy the Spanish University Delegation will consign the *Sedes Sapientiae* Icon to the Delegation from *La Sapienza* University of Rome. This will mark the beginning of the Marian *peregrinatio* to the chaplaincies, which I will accompany with my prayer. Be assured that the Pope trusts in you and your faithful testimony and apostolic commitment.

Dear friends, let us hasten confidently together this evening on the journey to Bethlehem, taking the expectations and hopes of our brethren with us so that all may encounter the Word of life and entrust themselves to him. This is my hope that I address to Rome's academic community: take to everyone the proclamation that the true Face of God is in the Child of Bethlehem, so close to each one of us that it is impossible for anyone to feel excluded, no one must doubt in the possibility of the encounter for he is the patient and faithful God, who knows how to wait and how to respect our freedom.

This evening let us profess with trust the deepest aspiration of our heart: "Your face, Lord, do I seek. Come, do not delay". Amen.

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