



The Holy See

HOMAGE TO THE IMMACULATE AT THE SPANISH STEPS

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Tuesday, 8 December 2009

(Video)

Images of the celebration

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In the heart of Christian cities, Mary is a sweet and reassuring presence. In her discreet style, she gives everyone peace and hope, both in the happy and sad moments of life. In churches, chapels or on the walls of buildings there is a painting, mosaic or a statue as a reminder of the presence of the Mother, constantly watching over her children. Here too in Piazza di Spagna, Mary is placed high up as though on guard over Rome.

What does Mary tell the city? Of what does her presence remind us? It reminds us that "where sin increased, grace abounded all the more (Rom 5: 20), as the Apostle Paul wrote. She is the Immaculate Mother who tells people in our day too: Do not be afraid, Jesus has defeated evil, he has uprooted it, delivering us from its rule.

How great is our need of this good news! Every day, in fact, in the newspapers, on television and on the radio bad news is broadcast, repeated, amplified, so that we become used to the most terrible things and inured to them, and in a certain way poisoned, since the negative effect is never completely eliminated but accumulates day after day. The heart hardens and thoughts grow gloomy. For this reason, the city needs Mary whose presence speaks of God, reminds us of the victory of Grace over sin and leads us to hope, even in the most difficult human situations.

In the city invisible people live or survive who every now and then hit the front page headlines or television news and are exploited to the very last, as long as the news and images are newsworthy. This is a perverse mechanism which unfortunately few are able to resist. The city first hides them and then exposes them to public scrutiny, pitilessly or with false pity. Instead, there is in every person the desire to be accepted as a person and considered a sacred reality, for every human history is a sacred history and demands the utmost respect.

The city, dear brothers and sisters, is all of us! Each one of us contributes with his life to its moral atmosphere, for better or for worse. The border between good and evil runs through every heart and none of us should feel entitled to judge others. Rather, each one must feel duty bound to improve him or herself. The *mass media* always tends to make us feel like "spectators", as if evil concerned only others and certain things could never happen to us. Instead, we are all "actors" and, for better or for worse, our behaviour has an influence on others.

We often complain of the pollution of the atmosphere that in some parts of the city is unbreathable. It is true. Everyone must do his or her part to make the city a cleaner place. Yet, there is another kind of contamination, less perceptible to the senses, but equally dangerous. It is the pollution of the spirit; it makes us smile less, makes our faces gloomier, less likely to greet each other or look each other in the eye.... The city has many faces but unfortunately collective dynamics can make us lose our in-depth perception of them. We perceive everything superficially. People become bodies and these bodies lose their soul, they become things, faceless objects that can be exchanged and consumed.

Mary Immaculate helps us to rediscover and defend what lies within people, for in her is a perfect transparency of the soul in the body. She is purity in person, in the sense that spirit, soul and body are fully consistent with one another and with God's will. Our Lady teaches us to be open to God's action and to see others as he sees them: starting with the heart. And to look at them with compassion, with love, with infinite tenderness, especially those who are lonely, despised, or exploited. "Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more".

I want to pay homage publicly to all those who in silence, not with words but with deeds, strive to practice this evangelical law of love that propels the world forward. There are so many of them even here in Rome and they rarely hit the headlines. They are men and women of all ages, who have realized that it is not worth condemning, complaining or accusing; that it is better to respond to evil by doing good. This changes things; or rather it changes people, and hence improves society.

Dear Roman friends, and all of you who live in this city! While we are busy in our daily routine, let us listen to Mary's voice. Let us hear her silent but pressing appeal. She tells each one of us that wherever sin increases, grace may abound all the more, starting in your our own heart and in your life! And the city will be more beautiful, more Christian and more human.

Thank you, Holy Mother, for your message of hope. Thank you for your silent but eloquent presence in the heart of our city. Immaculate Virgin, *Salus Populi Romani*, pray for us!

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