



# The Holy See

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JOHN PAUL II

**GENERAL AUDIENCE**

*Wednesday, 25 April 1979*

The anniversary of the founding of Rome.

1. These words which, a few days ago, were recalled to the City and to the world, tell us a great deal! They also tell every individual man a great deal. Because man is a "historical being". That does not mean just that he is subjected to time, like all other living beings in this world of ours. Man is a historical being because he is capable of making of time, of the transitory, of the past, a particular content of his own existence, a particular dimension of his own "temporariness". All this happens in the various sectors of human life. Each of us, beginning from the day of his birth, has a history of his own. At the same time each of us, through history, is part of the community. The fact that each of us, as a "social being", belongs to a certain group and to a determined society is *always realized by means of history*. It is realized on a certain historical scale.

In this way families have their history. And also nations have their history. One of the tasks of the family is to draw from the history and culture of the nation, and at the same time to prolong this history in the educative process.

When we speak of the anniversary of the founding of Rome, we meet with an even vaster reality. Certainly, a particular right and duty to refer to this event, to this date, belongs to the persons for whom the Rome of today is their City, their Capital. Nevertheless all the Romans of our time know perfectly well that the exceptional character of this City, of this Capital, consists in the fact that *they cannot limit Rome merely to their own history*. Here it is necessary to go back to a past far more distant in time and to conjure up not only the *centuries* of the ancient Empire, but even more remote times, until we arrive at that date that recalls to us the founding of Rome.

An immense heritage of history, various eras of human culture and civilization, different socio-political changes, separate us from that date and at the same time unite us with it. I would say even more: this date, the founding of Rome, marks not only the beginning of a succession of human generations who lived in this City, and together in this peninsula; the founding of Rome is also *a beginning for distant peoples and nations*, who feel a link and a special unity with the Latin cultural tradition, in its deepest contents.

I, too, though I came here from distant Poland, feel bound by my spiritual genealogy to the founding of Rome, just like the whole nation from which I come, and many other nations of contemporary Europe, and not only of Europe.

2. The anniversary of the founding of Rome has a quite special eloquence for us who believe that the history of man on earth the history of the whole of mankind reached a new dimension through the mystery of the Incarnation. *God entered man's history becoming Man*. This is the central truth of the Christian faith, the fundamental content of the Gospel and of the mission of the Church.

Entering the history of man, becoming Man, God made this history, in all its extension, *the history of salvation*. What was fulfilled at Nazareth, Bethlehem and Jerusalem is history and, at the same time, it is a ferment of history. And although the history of men and peoples has developed and continues to develop along paths of its own, although the history of Rome—then at the peak of its ancient splendour—passed almost without noticing it alongside the birth, the life, the passion, the death and the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, yet these salvific events became *new leaven in the history of man*.

They became new leaven particularly in the history of Rome. It can be said that at the time when Jesus was born, at the time when he died on the cross and rose again, *ancient Rome, then the capital of the world experienced a new birth*. Not by chance do we find it already so deeply integrated in the New Testament. St Luke, who plans his Gospel as the path of Jesus to Jerusalem where the paschal mystery is accomplished, takes, in the Acts of the Apostles, as the point of arrival of the apostolic journeys, Rome, where the mystery of the Church will be manifested.

The rest is well known to us. The apostles of the Gospel, and first among them Peter of Galilee, then Paul of Tarsus, came to Rome and planted the Church here also. Thus in the capital of the ancient world there came into existence *the See of Peters successors*, of the bishops of Rome. Even before coming here, St Paul wrote his masterly letter to the Romans, and the Bishop of Antioch, Ignatius, addressed his spiritual testament to them, on the eve of martyrdom. What was Christian took root in what was Roman, and at the same time, after having fermented in the Roman soil, it began to germinate with new strength. With Christianity, what was "Roman" began to live a new life, while continuing to remain truly "native".

D'Arcy was right when he wrote: "There is in history a presence, which makes it something more than a mere 'succession of events'. As in a palimpsest, the new is indelibly superimposed on what is already written and widens its meaning indefinitely" (M.C.D'Arcy, S.J., *The Sense of History Secular and Sacred*, London 1959, 275). Rome owes to Christianity a new universality of its history, its culture, its heritage. This Christian ("catholic") universality of Rome endures even until today. Not only does it have two thousand years of history behind it, but it continues to develop incessantly: it reaches new peoples, new lands. And so people from all over the world willingly flock to Rome, to *find* themselves at home in this ever living centre of universality.

3. I will never forget the years, the months, the days in which I was here for the first time. My favourite spot, to which I returned most often, perhaps, was the ancient *Roman Forum*, still so well preserved today. How eloquent for me was the temple of S. Maria Antiqua, which rises directly on an ancient Roman building. Christianity entered the history of Rome not with violence, not with military force, not by conquest or invasion, but *with the force of testimony, paid at the clear price of the blood of the martyrs*, throughout more than three centuries of history. It entered with the strength of the evangelical leaven which, revealing to man his ultimate vocation and his supreme dignity in Jesus Christ (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 40; *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 22), began to act in the depths of souls, penetrating subsequently into human institutions and the whole of culture. That is why *this second birth of Rome* is so authentic and has within it such a charge of interior truth and such force of spiritual irradiation!

You, Romans of ancient date, accept this testimony of a man who has come here to Rome to become, by Christ's will, at the end of the second millennium, your Bishop. Accept this testimony and integrate it in your magnificent heritage, in which we all participate. *Man comes up from history*. He is the son of history, subsequently becoming its *responsible architect*. Therefore the heritage of this history commits him deeply. It is a great good for man's life, to be remembered not just on festivities, but every day! May this good always find an adequate place in our conscience and in our behaviour! And let us try to be *worthy of the history*, to which the temples, the basilicas and even more the Colosseum and the catacombs of ancient Rome bear witness here.

These are the wishes addressed to you, dear Romans, for the anniversary of the founding of Rome, by your Bishop, whom you welcomed, six months ago, so openheartedly, as the successor of St Peter and witness to that universal mission, which divine Providence has inscribed in the history book of the Eternal City.

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*Having giving his address in Italian, the Holy Father addressed various groups in other languages. To English speaking pilgrims who were present the Pope said:*

*Dear brothers and sisters,*

You are all very welcome to Rome. I greet in particular the American seminarians who are to be ordained deacons tomorrow, and I pray that God will abundantly bless you and your future ministry. My greeting goes also to each and every one of you, from whatever country or continent you have come.

*To the International Council for Catechesis:*

I now wish to address a special greeting to members of the International Council for Catechesis, composed of bishops, priests, Sisters and lay experts, who have met here in Rome in these days to examine the important subject of the "Formation of Catechists", and who, together with the superiors and some officials of the S. Congregation for the Clergy, which organized the meeting, have come here to express to the Pope their ecclesial communion.

I thank you, dear Brothers, for this significant presence of yours and, even more, for your active commitment in updating the delicate and important sector of catechesis, which is certainly the "opus princeps" of the Church's mission. The theme you have chosen is too vast and important for me to be able to refer to it here: I will limit myself, therefore, to a short and simple exhortation. I am of the opinion that in the catechist's formation, over and above all problems regarding the content and the method of teaching, uprightness of life and sincerity of Christian faith are necessary. Neither cultural preparation nor pedagogical skill are sufficient to make the revealed truths accessible to the mentality of modern man. These are necessary things, but they are not enough: the catechist must have a soul, which lives and brings life to everything he professes. In this connection I am glad to leave you, as an inspiring motive, some expressions of St Bonaventure of Bagnoregio, who, in his "Itinerarium mentis in Deum" admonished the teachers of his time, with sculptural clarity, as follows: "Nemo credat quod sibi sufficiat lectio sine unctione, speculatio sine devotione, investigatio sine admiratione, circumspectio sine exultatione, industria sine pietate, scientia sine charitate, intelligentia sine humilitate, studium absque divina gratia, speculum absque sapientia divinitus inspirata" (*Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, Introduction, n. 4).

All that demands of the catechist, of course, great love for Jesus Christ, our Master, it demands readiness to listen to his voice and follow him daily in order to be able to learn how he spoke, in his continual catechesis, to children, to the young, to the learned and to the ignorant.

This is, dear Brothers, the brief thought I wished to express to you. May the Holy Spirit sustain you in your work, and the Blessed Virgin, Sedes Sapientiae, encourage you in difficulties. To all of you my fatherly Blessing, which I willingly bestow also on all those who are engaged in various capacities in the delicate field of catechesis.

*To a group of diocesan priest delegates for the apostolate of manual labour:*

A cordial greeting now goes to the large group of priests, diocesan delegates for the apostolate of

manual labour, who are concluding in Rome today their annual Congress, organized by the National Office of the Italian Episcopal Conference for the Apostolate in the World of Manual Labour.

Beloved priests, I express to you my deep satisfaction with the interesting programme you have carried out in the last few days for a more effective "Apostolate of Manual Labour in Italian Churches".

As you well know, the Church follows with all care and anxiety the vast, varied and, sometimes, dramatic social question regarding the workers. Since she "cannot remain insensible to whatever serves man's true welfare, any more than she can remain indifferent to what threatens it" (Enc. *Redemptor Hominis*, n. 13), she constantly safeguards the Christian meaning of work and at the same time the inviolable dignity of the worker, which is all the more sacred the more it is recognized as having the first place which man occupies in the scale of values. Work, in fact, is for man, and not man for work. It must aim at serving man and not at subduing him: if that were not so, man again would become a slave and his stature would be measured—alas!—only with the yardstick of suffocating materialism.

It is necessary to reconsider the figure and the situation of the worker, so that he may be enabled to be more of a man and to regain his true greatness as collaborator in God's creative work when he imprints on matter the sign of his active mind.

It is up to you, dear priests, to make every effort in order that this wish may come true, so that the space between the Church and the Factory may be lessened and the smoke of incense mingle, in its ascent to heaven, with that of industries. In your pastoral action take care, in the first place, of those who are still suffering because of the heaviness and unhealthiness of their work, uncertainty about their employment, the insufficiency of their dwellings and of their wages. But take care also and above all in order that the workers may be able to rediscover and support the inborn tendency to the highest values of the spirit; faith, hope, and justice. Succeed, in a word, in projecting the light of the Gospel upon the difficult but attractive world of manual work.

And for you priests and those who help you in your work of human and Christian solidarity, I pray to the Heavenly Father, imploring from him, through the Blessed Virgin, Mother of the divine Workman, a special Apostolic Blessing.

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