



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Wednesday 29 March 2000

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. Following the commemoration of Abraham and my brief but intense visit to Egypt and Mount Sinai, my Jubilee pilgrimage to the *Holy Places* brought me to the land that saw the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the beginning of the Church. My heart is filled with inexpressible joy and gratitude for this gift of the Lord, to which I had so looked forward. After visiting the Holy Land during the Second Vatican Council, I have now had the grace of returning there, together with some of my collaborators, in the year of the Great Jubilee, the 2,000th anniversary of Christ's birth. It was a return, in a sense, to the origins, to the roots of our faith and of the Church.

I thank the Latin Patriarch and the Bishops of the various Eastern Catholic Churches in the Holy Land, as well as the Franciscans of the Custody for their warm welcome and for all they did. I warmly thank the Jordanian, Israeli and Palestinian authorities who welcomed and assisted me during my religious journey. I appreciated their generous efforts to ensure the success of my visit and I reassured them of the Holy See's concern for a just peace among all the peoples of the region. I am grateful to the communities of those lands for the warm welcome they gave me.

2. The first stop - *Mount Nebo* - was a continuation of my visit to Sinai: from the top of that mountain Moses beheld the Promised Land after fulfilling the mission entrusted to him by God and before giving up his soul to him. I began my journey, in a certain sense, with Moses' own gaze, realizing its evocative power that transcends centuries and millennia.

That gaze was turned to the Jordan Valley and the Judean desert, where, in the fullness of time,

the voice would ring out of *John the Baptist*, sent by God, like a new Elijah, to prepare the way for the Messiah. Jesus wanted to be baptized by him, revealing that he was the Lamb of God who took upon himself the sin of the world. The figure of John the Baptist led me in the footsteps of Christ. I joyfully celebrated a solemn Mass in Amman Stadium for the Christian community living in that area, whom I found fervently religious and well integrated into the country's society.

3. After leaving Amman I stayed at the Apostolic Delegation in Jerusalem. From there my first destination was *Bethlehem*, the city where 3,000 years ago King David was born and where 1,000 years later, according to the Scriptures, the Messiah was born. *In this year 2000 Bethlehem is the focus of the Christian world's attention*: from there came the Light of nations, Christ the Lord; from there spread the proclamation of peace for all men whom God loves.

Along with my collaborators, the Catholic Ordinaries, a number of Cardinals and many other Bishops, I celebrated Holy Mass in the city's main square, which is next to the cave where Mary gave birth to Jesus and laid him in a manger. *The joy of Christmas, the joy of the Great Jubilee, is renewed in mystery*. It was as if we could hear Isaiah's prophecy again: "To us a child is born, to us a son is given" (Is 9: 6), with the angel's message: "I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for behold to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord" (Lk 2: 10-11).

In the afternoon, I knelt with deep emotion in the cave of the Nativity, where I felt the whole Church spiritually present, all the world's poor among whom God chose to pitch his tent. A God who became an exile and a refugee in order to bring us back to his house. This thought accompanied me - before leaving the Palestinian Autonomous Territories - as I visited *one of the many camps* in Bethlehem where over three million *Palestinian refugees* have been living for too long. With everyone's effort may this sad problem finally be resolved!

4. The memory of *Jerusalem* can never be erased from my heart. Great is the mystery of this city where *the fullness of time became, so to speak, the "fullness of space"*. Indeed, Jerusalem hosted the central, culminating event of salvation history: Christ's paschal mystery. It was there that the purpose for which the Word became flesh was revealed and fulfilled: in his death on the Cross and his Resurrection "everything was finished" (cf. Jn 19: 30). On Calvary the Incarnation was manifested as the Redemption in accordance with God's eternal plan.

The stones of Jerusalem bear a silent but eloquent witness to this mystery, starting with the *Upper Room*, where we celebrated the Holy Eucharist in the very place where it was instituted by Jesus. There, where the Christian priesthood was born, I remembered all *priests* and *signed the Letter* I addressed to them for next Holy Thursday.

Witness is also borne to this mystery by the olive trees and the rock of *Gethsemane* where Christ, seized with mortal anguish, prayed to the Father before his Passion. In a very special way Calvary

and the empty tomb, *the Holy Sepulchre*, testify to those dramatic hours. Last Sunday, the Lord's Day, I renewed in that very place the message of salvation which spans the centuries and millennia: Christ is risen! That was the moment when my pilgrimage reached its climax. For this reason I felt the need to pray again in the afternoon on Calvary, where Christ shed his blood for humanity.

5. In Jerusalem, the *Holy City for Jews, Christians and Muslims*, I met the Chief Rabbis of Israel and the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem. I then had a meeting with representatives of the other two monotheistic religions, Judaism and Islam. Despite great difficulties, Jerusalem is called to become the *symbol of peace among those who believe in the God of Abraham and submit to his law*. May men and women hasten the fulfilment of this plan!

At *Yad Vashem, the Shoah Memorial*, I paid homage to the millions of Jewish victims of Nazism. Once again I expressed my deep sorrow for that terrifying tragedy and reaffirmed that "we want to remember" in order to commit ourselves together - Jews, Christians and people of good will - to overcoming evil with good, so as to walk on the way of peace.

Today many Churches, heirs to ancient traditions, live their faith in the Holy Land. This diversity is a great treasure as long as it is accompanied by a spirit of communion in total fidelity to the faith of the Fathers. The *Ecumenical Meeting* held at the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem with everyone's enthusiastic participation marked an important step on the journey towards full unity among Christians. It gave me great joy to be able to speak with His Beatitude Diodoros, Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem, and with His Beatitude Torkom Manoogian, Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem. I invite everyone to pray that the process of understanding and of collaboration among the Christians of the various Churches will be strengthened and developed.

6. A special grace of this pilgrimage was to celebrate *Mass on the Mount of the Beatitudes* near the Sea of Galilee with a large number of *young people from the Holy Land and from all over the world*. A moment filled with hope! As I proclaimed and entrusted to young people the Commandments of God and the Beatitudes, I saw in them the future of the Church and the world.

Also on the shores of that lake, I was deeply moved in visiting *Tabgha*, where Christ multiplied the loaves, the "place of the primacy", where he entrusted to Peter the pastoral guidance of the Church, and lastly in Capernaum the remains of Peter's house and the synagogue where Jesus revealed himself as the Bread come down from heaven for the life of the world (*Jn 6: 26-58*).

Galilee! Homeland of Mary and the first disciples; homeland of the Church sent on mission among the nations! I think that Peter always had cherished it in his heart, and so does his Successor!

7. On the *liturgical feast of the Annunciation*, we went back in a sense to the sources of the mystery of faith and knelt in *the grotto of the Annunciation in Nazareth where, in Mary's womb,*

"the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn 1: 14). There, reflected in the Virgin's *"fiat"*, one can hear in silent adoration God's loving "yes" to man, the *amen* of the eternal Son, who opens the path of salvation to every human being. There, in the reciprocal self-giving of Christ and Mary, are the hinges of every "holy door". There, where God became man, man rediscovers his dignity and high calling.

I thank everyone in the various Dioceses, religious houses and contemplative communities who spiritually followed the steps of my pilgrimage, and I assure them that I took the whole Church with me in prayer to the places I visited. Once again, as I express my gratitude to the Lord for this unforgettable experience, I ask him with humble trust to draw from it abundant fruits for the good of the Church and of humanity.

Peace appeal for Mindanao:

My thoughts now turn to the beloved peoples of the Philippines where, on the large island of Mindanao, tensions have unfortunately increased and are causing violent clashes.

I pray for all the inhabitants of that region and, in particular, for the political and military leaders, that the Lord will enlighten and move them to do all they can to stop the violence and to seek peaceful solutions to the existing problems.

I express my closeness and solidarity to the families who are suffering because of this situation.

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To the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors the Holy Father said:

I welcome the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors present at today's audience, especially those from Estonia, England, Japan, Australia and the United States. I pray that your faith will be strengthened during your Jubilee pilgrimage and that you will be filled with a desire to serve God and neighbour, and to work for unity, justice and peace in the world. May God bless you and your families.

Dear Brothers and Sisters from Estonia!

I warmly welcome you on the occasion of your national Jubilee pilgrimage, led by Archbishop Erwin Josef Ender, Apostolic Administrator of Estonia and Apostolic Nuncio. May your pilgrimage to the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul strengthen your faith and your commitment to live according to the standards of the Gospel. As you walk in the footsteps of the holy martyrs of Rome, may you deepen your love of the Lord and his Church, and become ever more ready to serve your less fortunate brothers and sisters. Be courageous witnesses and joyful messengers of

Christ's living presence in the world!

God bless you! God bless Estonia!

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