



# The Holy See

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## EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION IN THE PARISH OF SAINT ANNE IN THE VATICAN

### *HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II*

*Sunday, 10 December 1978*

1. "Vobis ... sum episcopus, vobiscum sum christianus" ("For you I am a bishop, with you I am a Christian"): these words of St Augustine were re-echoed loudly in the texts of the Second Vatican Council, in its magisterium. They come to my mind this very day, as I visit St Anne's parish, the parish of Vatican City. This is, in fact, my parish. I have fixed abode in its territory like my Venerated Predecessors, and also like you, revered Brother Cardinals, Archbishops, Bishops, Priests, and you, dear Brothers and Sisters, my fellow parishioners. Here, in this church, I can repeat, particularly, the words that St Augustine addressed to his faithful on the anniversary of his episcopal ordination: "Sed et vos sustinete me, ut secundum praeceptum apostolicum, invicem onera nostra portemus et sic adimpleamus legem Christi (Gal 6:2) ... Ubi me terret quod vobis sum, ibi me consolatur quod vobiscum sum. Vobis enim sum episcopus, vobiscum sum christianus. Illud est nomen officii, hoc gratiae; illud periculi est, hoc salutis" (" But you too support me in order that, according to the command of the Apostle, we may bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ (Gal 6:2) ... While I am frightened by what I am for you, I am consoled by what I am with you. For you, in fact, I am a bishop, with you I am a Christian. The former is the name of an office, the latter of grace; the former is a name of danger, the latter of salvation ": *Serm.* 340, 1; *PL* 38, 1483).

In fact, the truth that each of us—you, revered and dear Brothers, and I—is a "Christian", is the first source of our joy, of our noble and serene pride, of our union and communion.

A "Christian": what a significance this word has and what riches it contains! The disciples were called Christians for the first time at Antioch, as we read in the Acts of the Apostles, when they describe the events of the apostolic period in that city (Acts 11:26). Christians are those who have

received the name of Christ; those who bear his mystery within themselves; those who belong to him, with all their humanity; those who, with full awareness and freedom, "agree" to his impressing upon their human being the dignity of children of God. Christians!

The parish is a community of Christians. A fundamental community.

2. Our Vatican parish is dedicated to St Anne. As is known, it was our predecessor Pius XI, with the Apostolic Constitution "Ex Lateranensi pacto", dated 30 May 1929, who gave a particular religious character to Vatican City: the Bishop Sacristan, an office which had been entrusted to the Order of St Augustine since 1352 by Clement VI, was nominated Vicar General of Vatican City; St Anne's church, which had long been looked after by the hard-working Augustinian Fathers, was erected a parish. Subsequently, with the Motu Proprio "Pontificalis Domus" of 28 March 1968, His Holiness Paul VI of venerated memory eliminated the title of "Sacristan", leaving, however, the office intact. It was maintained under the name of "Vicar General of His Holiness for Vatican City".

I wish, therefore, to address a fatherly and affectionate greeting to my Vicar General and to his immediate collaborators; to the parish priest; to the zealous Fathers who show such dedication for pastoral care of the parish and for the decorum of the various Chapels of the Vatican; to the other religious men and women, who carry out their industrious and meritorious service for the Holy See; to all parishioners of this unique Community.

3. I have desired so much to visit "my parish", already at the beginning of my Pontificate, as one of the first among the parishes of the Diocese of Rome: I am happy that this should happen just in the period of Advent.

The figure of St Anne reminds us, in fact, of the paternal home of Mary, the Mother of Christ. Mary was born there, bearing in her that extraordinary mystery of the immaculate conception. There she was surrounded by the love and solicitude of her parents: Joachim and Anne. There she "learned" from her mother, from St Anne, how to be a mother. And although, from the human point of view, she had renounced motherhood, the Heavenly Father, accepting her total donation, gratified her with the most perfect and holy motherhood. Christ, from the Cross, transferred in a certain sense his mother's maternity to his favourite disciple, and likewise he extended it to the whole Church, to all men. When, therefore, as "children of (divine) promise" (cf. Gal 4:28, 31), we find ourselves in the range of this motherhood, and when we feel its holy depth and fullness, let us think then that it was St Anne herself who was the first to teach Mary, her daughter, how to be a Mother.

"Anne" in Hebrew means "God (subject understood) has given grace". Reflecting on this meaning of St Anne's name, St John of Damascus exclaimed: "Since it was to happen that the Virgin Mother of God should be born from Anne, nature did not dare to precede the seed of grace; but it remained without its fruit in order that grace might produce its own. In fact, there was to be born that first-born who would give birth to the first-born of every creature" (*Serm. VI, De nativ. B.V.M.*,

2; *PG* 96, 663).

As we come here today, all of us, parishioners of St Anne's in the Vatican, let us turn our hearts to her and, through her let us repeat to Mary, Daughter and Mother:

"Monstra Te esse Matrem,  
Sumat per Te preces,  
Qui pro nobis natus,  
Tulit esse Tuus".

(Show yourself our Mother,  
He will hear your pleading  
Whom your womb has sheltered  
And whose hands bring healing)

(Translation from English Breviary: Editor's note).

On the second Sunday of Advent these words seem to take on special significance.

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