



The Holy See

ADVENT MASS FOR THE STUDENTS
OF THE ROMAN STATE UNIVERSITIES

HOMILY OF POPE JOHN PAUL II

Tuesday, 16 December 1997

"Rorate caeli, desuper, et nubes pluant iustum: aperiatur terra, et germinet Salvatorem" (Entrance antiphon; cf. Is 45:8).

1. With these words today's liturgy expresses the world's expectation of the Saviour who is about to come.

For some years now the season of Advent, which urges believers to "go with good works to meet" Christ who comes, has been an occasion for teachers and students to share with their Bishop the grace and joy of waiting for the Lord.

Moreover, the participation of representatives from non-Roman athenaeums gives the event a richer and broader dimension, making it in a way an Advent celebration for the whole Italian academic world. On this occasion I would like to offer each of you my cordial Christmas greetings and, above all, to ask the divine Child for the graces needed by everyone who works in the university world. I especially thank the professor and student who conveyed the sentiments you share.

2. The Word of God proclaimed a few moments ago refers to the *Lord's vineyard*, an evocative allegory that occurs frequently in the Gospels and is the main theme of today's passage. What does the image of the vineyard call to mind? Following the Gospel texts, we could say that it represents the whole created cosmos which, through Christ's coming, becomes God's property in a special way. In fact, through Christ's Redemption, the cosmos and man begin to belong to God in a new way. We can therefore say that in a certain sense Christmas is the holy day when the visible and the inanimate assume, on the basis of that event, a different and unexpected meaning, because "God", as the Evangelist John reminds us, "so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16). Do not these words contain the pregnant meaning of the vineyard image, to which Jesus often refers in his preaching?

Through the mystery of the Incarnation of the Word, man and the cosmos can rejoice in discovering that it is they who are the "Lord's vineyard", the object of God's saving love.

3. "Go and work in my vineyard!" (cf. Mt 21:28), says the father to his two sons in the Gospel parable, and he expects an answer from them: he is not satisfied with words; he wants an actual commitment. The two respond differently: the first says he is willing but then does nothing; the other apparently refuses his father's invitation, but after some evasiveness does what he is asked. The Evangelist Matthew thus presents a typology of the attitudes towards God that men have taken down through history. The Gospel invitation to work in the Lord's vineyard echoes in the lives and hearts of every man and woman, called to dedicate themselves actively to the divine vineyard and to become involved in the mission of salvation. In this parable each one of us can recognize his own personal experience.

4. Dear friends, the university world you represent here is a particularly fertile ground for the development of the human talents which the Lord has given each individual for the good of all. By using them and developing them through study and research, whoever possesses them is capable of undertaking initiatives that can promote the authentic progress of the world.

However, as the Second Vatican Council reminds us, "the advantages of human progress are fraught with grave temptations: the hierarchy of values has been disordered, good and evil intermingle, and every man and every group is interested only in its own affairs, not in those of others. So it is that the earth has not yet become the scene of true brotherhood; rather, man's swelling power at the present time threatens to put an end to the human race itself" (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 37).

5. Only when man, letting himself be guided by the divine Spirit, undertakes to enliven earthly affairs in view of God's kingdom (cf. *ibid.*, n. 72), does he co-operate in bringing about the authentic progress of humanity. By fostering the encounter with the Son of the living God, it is the Spirit who removes from man's heart every intellectual presumption and leads him to the true good and to true wisdom, which is a gift to be sought and received with humility. As I wrote in the *Letter to the Young People of Rome for the City Mission* - it is up to you, dear young people, to listen to the Spirit of the Lord in order to release the fresh, generous cultural energies that the enthusiasm of your age can certainly muster. The Pope entrusts this task especially to you, as *your vocation and service* on the journey of preparation for the Great Jubilee of the third millennium.

It corresponds, moreover, to the fitting efforts of the Italian Church to develop and make fruitful a *cultural project* with a Christian orientation.

Knowledge based on faith, in fact, has genuine cultural dignity. Knowledge of the faith illumines man's search and makes it fully human because "it is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh" as the Second Vatican Council teaches, "that the mystery of man truly becomes clear.... Christ, the new Adam, in the very revelation of the mystery of the Father and of his love, fully reveals man to himself and brings to light his most high calling" (*ibid.*, n. 22).

In this way a culture *of* man and *for* man develops; a culture rich in values, drawn by the splendour of the Truth, the Gospel of life for human beings in every age, which spreads and gains momentum in the fields of knowledge, enlivens the forms of life and behaviour, and the right ordering of society. The order of ethical values, in fact, has a role of primary importance in every culture.

6. Regarding the evangelization of culture, I would like to recall here two events of great significance. The *50th anniversary of the University Chapel of "La Sapienza"* occurs in 1998. The chapel was a precious gift of my venerable Predecessor Pius XII. The anniversary celebration in this place of high symbolic value will see the *chaplains of European universities* gathered in congress for the first time: a timely initiative, which I would like to encourage and for which I would like to thank the Congregation for Catholic Education and the Pontifical Councils for the Laity and for Culture, together with the chaplains and all the members of "La Sapienza" University, starting with the *Rector Magnificus*.

More distant in time but just as important is the project mentioned at the beginning of this celebration: the *World Meeting of University Teachers*, which will take place in the Year 2000 on the occasion of the Great Jubilee, with the theme: *The University for a New Humanism*. The scientific congresses for the individual disciplines, which will precede the plenary meeting with the Pope and will be held at various universities, will be a special opportunity to show how the Word of faith can illumine the ways in which man expresses the authentic gifts of his intelligence, which in every age seeks, discovers and expresses itself in the varied cultural production of the sciences, literature and the arts.

7. Dear brothers and sisters who live and work in the university world, the inspiring atmosphere of Christmas, which we are already enjoying, invites us to welcome with total readiness the Word who becomes flesh to save and ennoble the human creature. Gathered round the altar for the Eucharistic celebration, as we contemplate the mystery of Christ's birth, we are moved to ask ourselves how we can be faithful and generous workers in the service of his vineyard.

Jesus calls each of us to increase the places in our city where his Word of truth is proclaimed and studied, so that it may become a light and a support for everyone.

Let us open our hearts to the Lord who comes, so that when he arrives, he will find us all prepared to do his will.

Mary, Mother of Wisdom, help us to be like you, docile servants of your Son Jesus.

Amen!

