



# The Holy See

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## PASTORAL VISIT TO THE PARISH OF SAINT FULGENTIUS IN ROME

### *HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II*

*Sunday, 14 February 1999*

1. *"Blessed are those who walk in the law of the Lord"* (Responsorial Psalm).

On this Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time, which precedes the beginning of Lent by a few days, the liturgy speaks of the fulfilment of the law brought about by Christ. He declares that he has not come to abolish the old law but to fulfil it. By sending the Holy Spirit, he will write the law in the hearts of believers, that is, in the place where personal and responsible decisions are made. Here is that "something more" which will enable people to accept the law not as an external command, but rather as an inner choice. Thus the law promulgated by Christ is a law of "holiness" (cf. Mt 5:18); it is the supreme law of love (cf. Jn 15:9-12).

The passage we have just heard from the Book of Sirach also refers to the personal responsibility rooted in man's heart. It emphasizes the person's freedom regarding good and evil: "He has placed before you fire and water: stretch out your hand for whichever you wish" (Sir 15:16). This is how we are shown the way to true happiness: by docilely listening to the law of the Lord and promptly putting it into practice.

2. Dear brothers and sisters of St Fulgentius Parish: I greet you with the words of the liturgy: "Blessed are those who walk in the law of the Lord!". I have come to visit you and to share the joys and hopes, commitments and expectations of your parish community.

First, I greet the Cardinal Vicar with the Auxiliary Bishop of this area; I greet your dear parish priest, Fr Giorgio Alessandrini, the priests who work with him, and the men and women religious who work in the neighbourhood. I would like to extend a word of special appreciation to the *Sisters of Our Lady of the Retreat in the Cenacle* and to the *Dominican Sisters*, who have made their private chapels available to the faithful for the celebration of Mass on feast-days, since the parish church cannot meet the needs of the whole community. I greet those who in various ways are

involved in the associations, movements and apostolic groups, as well as in the participatory structures; they are more and more dedicated to making the parish a genuine family of believers. My thoughts also turn with affection to the children and young people, to the families, the sick and the elderly. I extend my cordial greetings to all the inhabitants of this neighbourhood.

3. Dear brothers and sisters, in our daily apostolic efforts we must not, as the Apostle Paul makes clear in the second reading, be conformed to the logic of the "wisdom of this world", but to another "secret and hidden wisdom", revealed by God in Christ and through the Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 2:6-10). These words spur and comfort every believer, especially the pastoral workers who wish to give deep spiritual vitality to their work, not seeking human success, but God's kingdom and his righteousness (cf. Mt 6:33).

I know that you are devoting yourselves with great zeal to making your parish dynamic and open, so that it can respond to the spiritual challenges of the neighbourhood. Continue courageously on this path, giving priority to those aspects of evangelization which seek to give everyone a mature Christian formation. In the first place, foster the spiritual growth of individuals with doctrinal instruction that is firmly rooted in the tradition of the Church. To transmit zealously the patrimony of the faith demands care and methods adapted to the various age groups, without neglecting anyone: from children to young people, from families to the elderly.

A privileged place should also be given to family ministry and the preparation of young people and engaged couples for marriage. In this regard, I am pleased with your concern to promote their active participation in the liturgy and the way you encourage families to have a personal encounter with the Word of God. You must also give concrete witness to your solidarity with the poor and the suffering, and so reveal the heavenly Father's merciful love to all. Doctrinal soundness and an efficient pastoral organization will thus be combined with a generous openness to your brothers and sisters, especially those in trouble, by highlighting the missionary dimension which is part of every Christian community.

4. *"Grant that the Christian people ... may fulfil the demands of the Gospel and become a sign of reconciliation and peace for every human being"* (Collect, Messale Romano, p. 985).

This is how we prayed at the beginning of our celebration. May the Lord help us to be faithful to him and fearless in bearing witness to his message of salvation. May he help your community grow in missionary zeal, so that in the context of the City Mission it will spread the Gospel of hope in every home, wherever people live and work. The residents of this neighbourhood are waiting for it, many of whom are inclined, by their upbringing, social role or profession to consider the protection of their privacy as one of the most important values, sometimes, unfortunately, to the detriment of greater involvement in community life.

I think that the City Mission itself can be a fitting occasion for overcoming these problems. By

carefully and enthusiastically inviting every resident of the neighbourhood to share in the parish the liberating experience of encountering Christ, you will help them grow together in mutual trust and in the sharing of faith.

Is this not the goal of the City Mission? I sincerely hope that your parish, like all the others in the Diocese, will follow this path of seeking out people where they live and work. As we near the historic event of the Jubilee, we are called to spread the Gospel, the leaven of authentic spiritual, social and cultural renewal, with ever greater zeal.

5. Such a great missionary task involves the whole ecclesial community and asks each member for a generous contribution. Special attention should be given to the young, called to be the evangelizers of their peers. With regard to the young, my thoughts already turn to *World Youth Day* of the Year 2000. Rome is preparing to welcome and intensely live that moment, which we hope will be an occasion of deep vocational enrichment for all the young men and women who take part, as they personally ask themselves: "Teacher, what good deed must I do?" (cf. Mt 19:16ff.). Let us entrust the youth of Rome, and especially of this parish, to Mary's motherly heart, so that they can respond generously to the call to holiness, fulfilling what the Lord asks of each of them.

For all of the parish community, let us ask the Blessed Virgin for the gift of accepting God's will and faithfully carrying it out in everyday life.

6. *Blessed are you, Father, ... you have revealed to little ones the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven* (Gospel Acclamation).

It is to little ones that God manifests his wisdom and reveals his plans of salvation. How many times in our daily work do we experience this! How many times does the Lord choose seemingly ineffective ways to carry out his providential designs of salvation!

Blessed are you, Father, because you have revealed a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which you decreed before the ages for our glorification (cf. 1 Cor 2:7)!

Help us to seek always and only your wise will. Make us instruments of your love, so that we may walk in your law without halting. Open our eyes, so that we can see the wonders of this law; give us understanding, so that we may wholeheartedly obey and keep it.

Amen!

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