



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT TO THE NATIVITY OF MARY PARISH

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Sunday, 25 February 2001

1. *"Open our hearts, O Lord, to listen to the words of your Son".*

The invocation of the Gospel Acclamation introduces us to today's theme for the Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time. Jesus is the true Teacher, who communicates the truth of salvation to mankind. Those who listen to him are invited to "understand", that is, to receive his words into their hearts and translate them into concrete decisions in life.

Jesus not only imparts teaching that comes from God, but is above all the Model on which to pattern ourselves; he did not leave us simply a collection of teachings to learn; above all, he showed us the path to take, offering himself as an example to follow.

Let us therefore open our hearts to him: we will thus enter into the mystery of his love, which enlightens all existence.

2. *"A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully taught will be like his teacher"* (Lk 6: 40).

By following Christ, our divine Teacher, we learn that to be his disciples we must follow him especially in his ability to love, just as he describes in the passages from Luke's Gospel which we are reading on these Sundays. The heart of his message is precisely love, even love for one's enemies, which knows no revenge and offers pardon; it is mercy and the willingness to love always, even at the cost of one's life, like God himself (cf. Lk 6: 27-38).

This is the teaching to accept and faithfully transmit. This is the only school that forms authentic

missionaries of the Gospel, who are called to be wise and sure guides for their brothers (cf. *Lk* 6: 39).

3. With these sentiments I greet you, dear brothers and sisters of *Nativity of Mary Parish in Via di Bravetta!*

I am pleased to be with you, as I continue my pastoral visits to Roman parishes. I joyfully thank those who welcomed me at the beginning of the Eucharist and expressed your sentiments. In a special way, I would like to greet the Cardinal Vicar, the Auxiliary for this sector, Bishop Vincenzo Apicella, your dear parish priest, Fr Lorenzo Rossi, and the Canons Regular of the Immaculate Conception, who assist him in the pastoral care of the parish.

I also greet the Sons of the Immaculate Conception, who for a long time have made the church of the Father Luigi Monti Institute available for the celebration of Sunday Mass with the children, young people and their families.

I am also grateful to the Sisters of Our Lady of Compassion and to the Daughters of St Joseph, who live in the neighbourhood and, when no church or other site was available, had offered their facilities to the parish community. My sincere gratitude goes to them for this generous service to the parish, together with my encouragement to continue their appreciated collaboration in pastoral activities. In affectionately embracing everyone here, I wish to extend my cordial greeting to all the residents of the neighbourhood.

I know that you had to wait until last year for the construction of the new church where today, with deep satisfaction, we are celebrating the Eucharist.

Let us thank God for this work which took much effort and which, with the support of the Vicariate, you have finally been able to complete. Make this church a visible sign of unity and communion by overcoming that fragmentation of liturgical celebrations and catechetical sites which for a long time you were forced to maintain. If you proceed in unity and harmony, you will write a beautiful page in your parish community's spiritual and pastoral life.

4. In order to help you on this journey, allow me symbolically to give you the Message which last week I addressed to the Diocese of Rome at the end of the Jubilee and in view of the great Diocesan Convention next June. Reflect on it carefully and translate its guidelines into concrete apostolic decisions. Lent, which will begin in a few days, is a helpful occasion for this review of life. Ask yourselves both as individuals and as a community: what contribution can I make to the growth of full communion in the Church? How can I make my specific contribution, so that it becomes more and more a home and school of communion? We must walk in unity, if we are to bear witness together to the Gospel. This is the message that I leave you, dear brothers and sisters of Nativity of Mary Parish.

There are many apostolic needs in your neighbourhood which, like others, has experienced profound changes in just a few years. For some time, you have been offering good programmes for children and young people, engaged couples, families, the poor and the elderly. Continue on this path, giving priority to the care of families, which are often unable to provide their children with adequate Christian formation. There are children and adolescents who need someone to help them grow in faith; Christians who look for guides who can support in their Gospel witness and advise them in the various areas of their study, work and service.

I am thinking especially of you, dear young people, who are entrusted with the task of being the first evangelizers of your contemporaries as part of our Diocese's "permanent mission". May everyone responsibly assume his role in the parish community.

5. *"Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?" (Lk 6: 41).*

With these words Jesus gives us helpful guidance that we could call "pastoral". Unfortunately, we are often tempted to condemn the faults and sins of others, without being able to see our own with the same clarity. How then can we know if our own eye is free or if it is hampered by a log? Jesus replies: *"Each tree is known by its own fruit" (Lk 6: 44).*

This sound discernment is the Lord's gift and should be sought with unceasing prayer. At the same time, it is a personal victory that requires humility and patience, the ability to listen and an effort to understand others.

These must be the characteristics of every true disciple and involve commitment as well as a spirit of sacrifice. If it can sometimes seem difficult to follow the Lord on this path, let us rely on Mary's support and intercession.

In the facade of your church there is an arch set in the main body of the building. It recalls the Blessed Virgin, the Dawn of Salvation, always ready to embrace her children and lead them into church to meet Christ.

May she, the Virgin of silence and listening, help us to be courageous witnesses and proclaimers of the Gospel; may she make us look at others with eyes of understanding and kindness; may she obtain for us the gift of wise pastoral prudence.

And you, Lord, open our hearts; then we will understand your words of salvation. Amen!

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