



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT TO THE ROMAN PARISH
OF ST MARÍA JOSEFA OF THE HEART OF JESUS

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Sunday, 16 December 2001

1. *"Let the desert and the dry land be glad; the desert shall rejoice and blossom" (Is 35,1).*

The Liturgy of the Third Sunday of Advent, gives the name *Gaudete* to the Sunday because the first word of the Introit *Gaudete* invites us insistently to rejoice. "Rejoice", "be glad"! Along with vigilance, prayer and charity, Advent calls us to rejoice because our Saviour is close at hand.

In the first reading, we find a wonderful hymn to joy. The prophet Isaiah foretells the wonders that the Lord will accomplish for his people, freeing them from slavery and leading them back to their homeland. With his coming there will be the new and more telling exodus, that will make the people live fully the joy of communion with God.

For many who are discouraged, the "good news" of salvation resounds: *"They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away"* (cf. Is 35,10).

2. *"Be strong, fear not! Behold, your God.... He will come and save you" (Is 35,4).* The Messianic prophecy restores our confidence by giving us a glimpse of the true and complete liberation, brought about by Jesus Christ. In fact, in the Gospel passage just proclaimed, in his answer to the question of the disciples of John the Baptist, Jesus applies to himself what Isaiah had said: He is the awaited Messiah. Here are his words, *"Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the good news preached to them"* (Mt 11,4-5).

This is the real reason for our joy: Christ has brought the time of waiting to fulfillment. God has finally brought salvation for every man and woman, for humanity. In this spirit we can get ready to celebrate the feast of Christmas, the extraordinary event that rekindles in our hearts spiritual joy

and hope.

3. Dear brothers and sisters of the *Parish of St María Josefa of the Heart of Jesus!* The joy of being with you today is particularly strong. It is the delight of being able to visit the 300th parish community of the beloved Church of Rome. From the beginning of my Pontificate, I have made a priority of exercising the ministry of Bishop of Rome, even by visiting the parish communities of the Diocese.

In a special way I want to thank the Cardinal Vicar, who together with the Vicegerent and the Auxiliaries, has always been with me on these Sunday visits. With great fondness I recall the late Cardinal Poletti, the Bishops who have served the Diocese, the many parish priests and parochial vicars, as well as the thousands of faithful whom I have met on my pilgrimage through the various sections of our metropolis. For this occasion, I put my feelings on paper in the Letter that I addressed to the Cardinal Vicar, and through him, to the entire family of the Diocese, to share with him and with all of you my happiness on this extraordinary event.

On the visits I am amazed at the great amount of good, of spiritual fervour and of pastoral, apostolic and charitable creativity that I have witnessed! Each visit is a wonderful chance to give and to receive encouragement. While I desire to continue such an enriching pastoral experience, that takes me to parishes that are still waiting to meet their Bishop, I thank God for the mission he has entrusted to me. He has called me to be the Successor of the Apostle Peter, Bishop of the Church of Rome, of the Church that presides over the universal communion of charity (cf. Ignatius of Antioch, Introduction to the *Letter to the Romans*). I ask you to pray so that I may know how to correspond adequately to this mission.

4. Dear Brothers and Sisters of the Parish, thank you for your welcome. I want to greet you warmly. I greet your Parish Priest, Fr Angelo De Caro, and the Montfort Missionaries who cooperate with him in the care of the parish. I thank those who at the beginning of Mass greeted me in your name. I thank the faithful, who cooperate in supporting the outreach of the parish, to the young persons, to families, the sick, the senior citizens and all who live in this outlying area of a City in constant expansion.

I wish to thank the Institute of the Servants of Jesus who, with a genuine ecclesial spirit, made possible the construction of this new church, consecrated last 27 January, that is dedicated to their foundress, St María Josefa of the Heart of Jesus.

May the example of this Saint, who was animated by an intense love of the Eucharist and for her neighbour in difficulty, be a stimulus for you, dear Sisters, to grow in devotion to the Eucharist and in the care of their older sick and needy neighbours.

Let the Saint encourage you, dear parishioners, to work untiringly to transform your

neighbourhood into a truly human environment and to remove the risks of moral delinquency and disaffection that we find so often in the big cities.

6. The Diocese of Rome today observes the day of the collection to build new churches. Here we can experience the benefits that a whole parish complex brings to a neighbourhood. In your area, in fact, your church serves as a providential centre for bringing people together where they can be formed to listen to the call of God and to the service of their neighbour. Here too one can instill a missionary and vocational spirit that sensitizes the young above all, to an awareness to local and worldwide challenges. May the praiseworthy work of the Vicariate to build a parish centre in every area that needs one find a generous response in the people of every parish especially those who have greater resources and in religious congregations and institutes and in private and public entities.

7. *"Be patient until the coming of the Lord" (Jas 5,7).*

Advent invites us to rejoice, and at the same time, it exhorts us to wait with patience for the coming of the Lord now approaching. It exhorts us not to be discouraged, to resist every kind of adversity, with the certainty that the Lord will not delay his coming.

This vigilant patience, as the Apostle James stresses in the second reading, favours the strengthening of human ties in the Christian community. The faithful realize that they are little ones, who are poor and in great need of God's help, and they come together to receive the Messiah who is about to come. He will come in the silence, the humility, the poverty of the crib, and will bring his joy to all who welcome him with open hearts.

So let us advance with joyful hearts and minds towards Christmas. Let us make our own the inner reflections and prayers of Mary who awaited her Redeemer in prayer and silence and carefully prepared his Birth in Bethlehem. Amen!