



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE MEMBERS OF THE CURIA, OF THE PAPAL HOUSEHOLD
AND OF THE VICARIATE OF ROME**

Saturday, 22 December 2001

1. *Prope est iam Dominus. Venite adoremus!*

I welcome you with these words from the Advent liturgy and greet you cordially, Your Eminences, venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the priesthood, religious and lay people, members of the Roman Curia and the Vicariate of Rome. I thank Cardinal Bernardin Gantin, Dean of the College of Cardinals, for the good wishes he has addressed to me on your behalf, and I tell you all how pleased I am to meet you for this traditional family event. Our meeting expresses well the sense of deep communion with the Successor of Peter that enlivens and sustains your work. I am grateful to you for your devotion to the Apostolic See and for the generous commitment with which you share every day, in different ways, in my concern to carry out the *ministerium petrinum* entrusted to me. To you all, my heartfelt thanks!

The Lord's birth is at hand. Come let us adore him! Filled with wonder ever new, we approach the mystery of the birth of Christ *whose human face shines with God's tenderness*. Yes, God truly loves us! He did not forget men and women or leave them powerless and alone but sent his Son to put on their human flesh, to save them from the emptiness of sin and desperation.

"To all who received him ... he gave power to become children of God", says the Apostle John (Jn 1,12). In Jesus of Nazareth, he gives his very life to us. He makes us "sons in the Son", sharing his Trinitarian intimacy with us and making us brothers with one another. Christmas is the safe and ever fertile soil in which humanity's hope springs up. Contemplating the Child of Bethlehem means hoping in the advent of a new humanity, recreated in his image, victorious over sin and death. It means believing that in our history, scarred by so much suffering, *the last word will be that of life and love*. God has pitched his tent among us, to open to us the path to his eternal dwelling place.

2. Let us use this "figure" of eternity to interpret history and review the principal events - as is the

custom at our annual meeting - which have marked the past 12 months: I gladly do so with you, my appreciated collaborators, with gratitude to the God of life, who has human beings' actions and lives in his keeping.

I first recall how deeply moved I was *on the morning of Epiphany* on signing the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio ineunte*. I would once again like to praise God, the source of all good, for the countless graces that the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 brought to the Christian community, and for the renewal of apostolic zeal in the various local Churches that has flowed from the celebration of the 2,000th anniversary of Christ's birth. "*Duc in altum!*" (Lk 5,4). Once again "these words ring out for us today, and they invite us to remember the past with gratitude, to live the present with enthusiasm and to look forward to the future with confidence: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and for ever!" (*Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 1). At the beginning of the new millennium, the whole Church, setting out anew from Christ, sustained by the Father's love and comforted by the inexhaustible gift of the Spirit humbly places herself at the service of the world and with the witness of life and actions, *wishes to offer it her one treasure*: Christ the Lord, Saviour and Redeemer of man (cf. Acts 3,6).

3. This mission is entrusted in particular to all those who are called and sent, as successors of the Apostles, to tend God's flock (cf. I Pt 5,2). In this perspective, my first thought turns to the bishops of the different nations whom I have had the joy of receiving in recent months during their *visits "ad limina Apostolorum"*. I then remember the many prelates who experienced with me the *Tenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops*, on the theme: "The Bishop, Servant of the Gospel of Christ for the Hope of the World". In addition, on 22 November I published the Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Oceania*, in which I gathered the conclusions of the *Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops*, celebrated in 1998 on the problems and prospects of that great continent. Lastly, I cannot forget the *Consistory in February* at which many bishops and some priests were called to become members of the College of Cardinals, which then met in Rome *in May for the Extraordinary Consistory*.

These meetings - characterized by prayer, work, research in common and fraternal sharing - helped us to find the way forward for the Church to *proclaim Christ in our time* and to be more and more the salt of the earth and the light of the world (cf. Mt 5,13), so that all humanity "through hearing the summons to salvation may believe, through belief may hope, through hope may come to love" (*Dei Verbum*, n. 1).

4. The Lord granted me to make a "*Jubilee pilgrimage*" to the places linked to the history of salvation: indeed, I was able to go in St Paul's footsteps to Athens, Damascus and Malta, to commemorate the human and spiritual adventure of the Apostle to the Gentiles and his unreserved dedication to Christ's cause.

In every country I met with joy the Catholic communities of the different rites and I also wanted to

visit the Patriarchs and Archbishops of the *venerable Orthodox Churches of the East* to whom we are bound by the profession of faith in Christ, the one Lord and Saviour. With them, I could once again express the longing for the full unity of all believers in Christ and renew the commitment to strive to hasten the day of visible communion between Eastern and Western Christians.

Furthermore, I visited the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus which preserves the monument to John the Baptist, Precursor of Jesus, thus showing *the Catholic Church's respect for Islam*, albeit with clear recognition of the differences.

5. Keeping abreast with the commitment that has motivated me in the apostolic journeys I have made so far, that is, to strengthen the brethren in the faith (cf. Lk 22,32) and to comfort them in every kind of affliction (cf. II Cor 1, 3-4), in June I went to Ukraine where, in the century that has just ended, the children of the Catholic Church, together with other Christian brothers and sisters, experienced *ferocious persecution* and witnessed to the point of martyrdom to their adherence to our Lord Jesus. In those days I insistently prayed God that the Church in Europe might return to breathing with both lungs so that the whole continent might experience a renewed evangelization.

Then in September I went to *Kazakhstan* where I felt that people's firm intention to overcome the harshness of the past, marked by *oppression of the dignity and rights of the human person*.

There, I once again invited the followers of every religion firmly to reject violence, in order to help shape a life-loving humanity striving to achieve the goals of justice and solidarity.

Subsequently I went to *Armenia*, to pay homage to a nation which *has linked its history to Christianity for 17 centuries* and paid a high price for fidelity to its real identity: it is enough to think of the terrible mass extermination at the beginning of the 20th century. I was also deeply touched by the most courteous hospitality that His Holiness Catholicos Karekin II offered to me.

I warmly thank all those who welcomed me as a friend, a brother and a pilgrim. I assure them all of my remembrance in prayer. Likewise I accompany with special affection *the beloved Chinese people* whom I had very much in mind during the recent commemoration of the 400th anniversary *of the arrival in Peking of Fr Matteo Ricci*, an outstanding member of the Society of Jesus.

Without ignoring the difficulties and sufferings that at times mark the way, I reaffirm here my deep conviction that reciprocal knowledge and, wherever possible, common prayer are the privileged paths to understanding, solidarity and peace.

6. The shadow of the dramatic terrorist attack on New York, of the armed reaction in Afghanistan and of the mounting tensions in the Holy Land has darkened these last months of the year. In facing this situation, disciples of Christ, Prince of Peace (cf. Is 9,5), are called to proclaim with constancy that *any form of terrorist violence dishonours God's holiness* and human dignity and

that religion can never become a motive for war, hatred or oppression. I renew my pressing invitation to all people of good will to be unflagging in their efforts to find just solutions to the multiple conflicts that are tearing the world apart, and to assure a present and future of peace to one and all. It should not be forgotten that there is "no peace without justice, no justice without forgiveness!" (*Message for the World Day of Peace, 1 January 2002*).

Before being a fruit of human efforts however, *true peace is a gift of God*: in fact, Jesus Christ "is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility" (Eph 2,14). Since "fasting is the soul of prayer and mercy the life of fasting, these three things, prayer, fasting and mercy, are a single thing, each drawing life from the others" (St Peter Chrysologus, *Discourse 43, PL 52, 320*), I suggested to the children of the Church a day of penance and solidarity to be celebrated last *14 December*. In spiritual continuity, next *24 January*, we will turn once again to the One who, alone, can pull down the walls of enmity that separate men and women: in the city of St Francis representatives of the world religions, especially Christians and Muslims, will raise their heartfelt prayer for the end of hostilities and the fostering of authentic peace.

I thank all those in the various regions of the earth who are united in this penitential exercise: the fruit of their sacrifice will serve to alleviate the sufferings of so many innocent brothers and sisters, sorely tried by sorrow. I then invite them, and especially you, dear members of the Roman Curia and of the Vicariate of Rome, to join spiritually in the prayer that will be said in Assisi, so that the world may know days of peace.

7. For our comfort and to keep our hope buoyant, let us admire *the gift of holiness* that flowers ceaselessly among the People of God: the Church is the mother of saints! The fruitfulness of baptismal grace is made manifest by the lives of all the Christians *I have had the joy of raising to the honours of the altar* this past year, here in Rome and during my apostolic journeys in Ukraine and in Malta. In this bright panorama of "witnesses", bishops and priests, consecrated persons and lay people, I am particularly keen to remember the married couple, Luigi and Maria Beltrame Quattrocchi, the first in the Church's history to be beatified together as a couple, an eloquent testimony to holiness in marriage.

I entrust the unanimous invocation for peace in this Christmas season to the common intercession of all these exemplary brothers and sisters.

8. *Rorate caeli desuper, et nubes pluant iustum!*

Called to look on high (cf. Hos 11,7), in this invocation we sum up our ardent longing for the Lord. At Christmas, the invisible God makes himself present and visible for us in Jesus, Son of Mary, the *Theotokos*; He is the Emmanuel, God-with-us. "Such is the joyous conviction of the Church from her beginning whenever she sings "the mystery of our religion": "He was manifested in the flesh"

(*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 463).

In Jesus, God recalls his covenant, he rises like the sun high above us to grant us to serve him in holiness and justice and to direct our steps on the way of peace (cf. Lk 1,78-79). The Church, guardian of the certainty of his presence until the close of the age (Mt 28,20), proclaims with Augustine "Rejoice, you the righteous: it is the birth of the One who justifies. Rejoice, you, the weak and the ill: it is the birth of the Saviour.... Rejoice all Christians: it is the birth of the Lord" (*Sermo* 184, 2 *S.Ch.* 116).

May the Lord who comes grant to each and every one the gift of joy and peace: this is my heartfelt wish and my prayer for you and for all your loved ones as I cordially impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you, imploring a peaceful New Year for each one.