



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

HOMILY

Sunday, 9 May 1999

“Christ is risen!”.

1. *“Great are the works of the Lord!”.*

The responsorial psalm of today's liturgy is a song of glory to the Lord for the works he has done. It is a song of praise and thanksgiving for creation, the masterpiece of divine goodness and for the wonders the Lord has accomplished for his people in freeing them from slavery in Egypt and bringing them across the Red Sea.

What can we say then of the even more extraordinary work of the Incarnation of the Word, which fulfilled the original plan of human salvation? The heavenly Father's design is in fact fulfilled by the Death and Resurrection of Jesus and concerns people of every race and every age. Christ — St Peter recalls in the second reading — *“died for sins ... the righteous for the unrighteous ... being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit”* (1 Pt 3:18). Christ crucified has risen: this is the great Easter message that every believer is called to proclaim and witness to courageously.

Before leaving this earth, the Redeemer announces to the disciples the coming of the Paraclete: *“I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, to be with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him; you know him, for he dwells with you, and will be in you”* (Jn 14:16-17). Since then the Spirit has given life to the Church and made her a sign and instrument of salvation for all humanity. He works in the hearts of Christians and makes them aware of the gift and mission entrusted to them by the risen Lord. The Spirit spurred the Apostles to travel all the paths of the then-known world to proclaim the Gospel. This is the way the Gospel message reached and was spread here in Romania, through

the heroic witness of confessors of the faith and of martyrs, yesterday and in our century.

Considering the Church's history in Romania, we can truly say with hearts full of gratitude: "*Great are the works of the Lord!*".

2. "*Great are the works of the Lord!*". The psalmist's exclamation rises spontaneously in my heart during this visit, which gives me the opportunity to see with my own eyes the wonders God has accomplished through you down the centuries and especially in recent years.

Until recently it would have been unthinkable that the Bishop of Rome could visit his brothers and sisters in faith living in Romania. Today, after a long winter of suffering and persecution, we can at last exchange the embrace of peace and together praise the Lord. I greet you all with deep affection, dear brothers and sisters. I extend a respectful and cordial greeting to His Beatitude who, in a much appreciated act of charity, has wished to pray with us at this Eucharistic celebration. I am deeply touched by his presence and brotherhood. I offer him my gratitude, as I thank our Lord Jesus Christ for everything.

With renewed joy I greet you, dear and venerable Brothers in the Episcopate, with a special thought for the Pastor of this Archdiocese, Archbishop Ioan Robu, whom I warmly thank for the words he addressed to me at the beginning of Mass, and to the Metropolitan of F{\i-abreve}g{\i-abreve}ra{\i-scedilla} and Alba Iulia, Archbishop Lucian Mure{\i-scedilla}an, President of the Episcopal Conference. I spiritually embrace each and every Latin-rite Catholic and those of the Byzantine-Romanian rite, who are equally dear to my heart. I greet the priests, the religious and the laity who are dedicated to the apostolate. I greet the young people and the families, the sick and all who are suffering in body or spirit.

From this capital, I wish to embrace all of Romania and all its inhabitants: I assure everyone, near and far, of my affection and my prayer. It is a great spiritual joy for me to be in Romania and to give thanks to God with you for the marvellous works he has accomplished, which the liturgy of the Easter season invites us to recall with joy and gratitude.

3. As this century comes to an end and we can already glimpse the dawn of the third millennium, we look back to years past in order to discern the signs of divine mercy that always accompany the steps of those who trust in God.

How can we forget the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, which opened a new era in the Church's history, instilling in her new energy? Thanks to the Constitution *Lumen gentium*, the Church has acquired a deeper awareness of being the People of God on the way to the fulfilment of the kingdom. We sense the mystery of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church and see the value of her mission in a particular way here in Romania, where Christians of the Eastern and Western traditions live side by side. They are striving for unity, anxious to respond to Christ's

command, and thus they long for dialogue, reciprocal understanding and mutual help. This longing for fraternal cooperation, supported by prayer and inspired by mutual respect and esteem should always be fostered and encouraged, because only peace builds, while discord destroys.

In the name of this great ecumenical inspiration, I address all believers in Christ who live in Romania. I am here among you, spurred solely by the desire for genuine unity and the will to fulfil the Petrine ministry which the Lord has entrusted to me among my brothers and sisters in the faith. I give thanks to God that I can fulfil this ministry. I fervently hope and pray that full fraternal communion among all believers in Christ in East and West will be achieved as soon as possible. The Divine Master prayed for this unity, enlivened by love, in the Upper Room on the eve of his Passion and Death.

4. This Christian unity is first of all the work of the Holy Spirit, to whom we must constantly pray. On the day of Pentecost, the Apostles, who until that moment had been uneasy and fearful, were filled with courage and apostolic zeal. They were not afraid to proclaim Christ crucified and risen; they were not afraid to demonstrate their fidelity to the Gospel by their words and their lives, even when this meant persecution and death. Many in fact paid for this fidelity with martyrdom. The Church, guided by the Spirit, thus spread to every region in the world.

If misunderstandings and, unfortunately, painful separations have sometimes occurred within the one and undivided Mystical Body of Christ, the awareness of what unites all believers and their common call to unity has remained stronger than any division. At the end of the second millennium, paths that had diverged are drawing closer together and we are witnessing an intensification of the ecumenical movement to achieve the full unity of believers. Signs of this continual progress towards unity can be seen in your country, Romania, whose culture, language and history bear vivid marks of the Latin and Eastern traditions. My fondest hope is that Jesus' prayer in the Upper Room: *"Father, that they may all be one"* (cf. *Jn 17:21*), will always be on your lips and never cease to beat in your hearts.

5. *"He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him"* (*Jn 14:21*).

These words of Jesus, entrusted to the disciples on the eve of his Passion, echo for us today as a pressing invitation to continue on this path of fidelity and love. To love Christ! This is our life's ultimate goal: to love him in the everyday situations of life so that the Father's love will be manifested to the world; to love him with all our strength so that his plan of salvation will be fulfilled and believers will attain full communion in him. May this ardent desire never die in our heart!

Dear Catholics of Romania, I know well how you suffered during the years of the harsh communist regime; I also know how courageously you have persevered in your fidelity to Christ and his Gospel. Now as we stand on the threshold of the third millennium, be not afraid: open the doors of

your heart to Christ the Saviour. He loves you and is close to you; he calls you to a renewed commitment to evangelization. Faith is a gift from God and a heritage of incomparable value to be preserved and spread. In defending and fostering common values, always be open to active cooperation with all the ethnic, social and religious groups that make up your country. May your every decision be motivated by hope and love.

May Mary, Mother of the Redeemer, guide and protect you, so that you can write new pages of holiness and generous Christian witness in the history of Romania.

Amen! "Christ is risen!".