



The Holy See

TE DEUM AND FIRST VESPERS
OF THE SOLEMNITY OF MARY, MOTHER OF GOD

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

St Peter's Basilica
Thursday, 31 December 2009

(Video)

Images of the celebration

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

At the end of a year full of events for both the Church and the world we are meeting this evening in the Vatican Basilica to celebrate First Vespers of the Solemnity of Mary Mother of God and to raise a hymn of thanksgiving to the Lord of time and history.

It is first of all the words of the Apostle Paul that we have just heard which shed a special light on the conclusion of the year: "When the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman... so that we might receive adoption as sons" (Gal 4: 4-5).

The concentrated Pauline passage speaks to us of "time... fully come", and enlightens us as to the content of these words. In the history of the human family, God wanted to introduce his eternal Word, making him take on a humanity like our own. With the Incarnation of the Son of God, eternity entered time and human history was opened to absolute fulfilment in God. Time was, so to speak, "touched" by Christ, the Son of God and of Mary, and received from him new and surprising significance: it became a time of salvation and grace. In this same perspective, we must consider the time of the year that is ending and of that which is beginning so that we may put the most different events of our life important or small, simple or undecipherable, joyful or sad under the sign of salvation and hear the call God is addressing to us in order to lead us toward a goal that lies beyond time itself: eternity.

The Pauline text also means to underline the mystery of God's closeness to all humankind. It is the closeness proper to the mystery of Christmas: God makes himself man and man is given the unheard-of possibility to be a son of God. All this fills us with great joy and leads us to offer praise to God. We are called to say with our voices, our hearts and our lives "thank you" to God for the gift of the Son, the source and fulfilment of all the other gifts with which divine love fills the existence of each one of us, of families, of communities, of the Church and of the world. The hymn of the *Te Deum* which today rings out in churches in every corner of the earth is intended as a sign of the joyful gratitude with which we address God for all that he has offered us in Christ. Truly "from his fullness have we all received, grace upon grace" (Jn 1: 16).

In keeping with a happy custom, this evening I would like to thank the Lord with you in particular for the superabundance of graces he has lavished upon our diocesan community of Rome in the course of the year that is coming to a close. I would like first of all to address a special greeting to the Cardinal Vicar, to the Auxiliary Bishops, to the priests, to the consecrated people, as well as to the many lay faithful who are gathered here. I likewise greet the Mayor and Authorities present with respectful cordiality. I then extend my thoughts to all who live in our city, particularly those who are in situations of difficulty and hardship: I assure to each and every one my spiritual closeness, strengthened by constant remembrance in prayer.

As regards the progress of the Diocese of Rome, I renew my appreciation of the pastoral decision to dedicate time to review the ground covered in order to increase the sense of belonging to the Church and to foster pastoral co-responsibility. To emphasize the importance of this reappraisal, I too wished to make my own contribution by addressing the [Diocesan Convention at St John Lateran, in the afternoon of last 26 May](#). I rejoice because the diocesan programme is proceeding positively, with a far-reaching apostolic action. It is being carried out in the parishes, the prefectures and the various ecclesial associations in two essential contexts for the life and mission of the Church: the celebration of the Sunday Eucharist and the witness of charity. I would like to encourage the faithful to participate in large numbers in the assemblies that will be held in the various parishes so as to make an effective contribution to building up the Church. Today too, the Lord wants to make his love for humanity known to the inhabitants of Rome and entrusts to each one, in the diversity of ministries and responsibilities, the mission of proclaiming his word of truth and of witnessing to charity and solidarity.

Only by contemplating the mystery of the Incarnate Word can human beings find the answer to the great questions of human existence and thus discover the truth of their own identity. For this reason the Church, throughout the world and also here in the City, is working to promote the integral development of the human person. I was therefore pleased to learn that a series of "cultural meetings in the Cathedral" have been planned, whose theme will be my recent Encyclical [Caritas in Veritate](#).

For some years many families, numerous teachers and parish communities have been dedicated

to helping young people build their future on firm foundations, especially on the rock that is Jesus Christ. I hope that this renewed educational commitment may increasingly achieve a fertile synergy between the ecclesial community and the City so as to help young people plan their own lives. I likewise express the wish that a precious contribution in this important area may come from the Convention promoted by the Vicariate that will be held next March.

To be authoritative witnesses of the truth about the human being prayerful listening to the word of God is essential. In this regard, I would like above all to recommend the ancient tradition of *lectio divina*. The parishes and the various ecclesial realities, also thanks to the booklet prepared by the Vicariate, will be able to promote this ancient practice and put it to good use so that it becomes an essential part of ordinary pastoral care.

The word, believed, proclaimed and lived impels us to acts of solidarity and sharing. In praising the Lord for the help that the Christian communities have been able to offer generously to all who have knocked at their door, I would like to encourage all to persevere in their commitment to alleviating the difficulties besetting many families, sorely tried by the economic crisis and unemployment. May the Nativity of the Lord which reminds us of how God came to save us of his own free will, taking on our humanity and giving us his divine life help every person of good will to understand that it is only by opening oneself to God's love that human action is changed and transformed, becoming the leaven of a better future for all.

Dear brothers and sisters, Rome needs priests who are courageous heralds of the Gospel and, at the same time, reveal the merciful face of the Father. I invite young people not to be afraid to respond with the complete gift of their lives to the call that the Lord addresses to them to follow him on the path of priesthood or of consecrated life.

I hope, from this moment, that the meeting next 25 March, the 25th anniversary of the institution of the [World Youth Day](#) and the 10th anniversary of [the unforgettable Day at Tor Vergata](#), may be for all the parish and religious communities, and for the movements and associations, a strong moment of reflection and invocation, to obtain from the Lord the gift of numerous vocations to the priesthood and the consecrated life.

As we take our leave of the year that is ending and set out towards the new one, today's Liturgy ushers us into the Solemnity of Mary Most Holy, Mother of God. The Blessed Virgin is Mother of the Church and Mother of each one of her members, that is, Mother of each of us, in Christ. Let us ask her to accompany us with her caring protection, today and for ever, so that Christ may one day welcome into his glory, into the assembly of the Saints: *Aeterna fac cum sanctis tuis in gloria numerari*. Alleluia! Amen!

