



The Holy See

URBI ET ORBI MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE BENEDICT XVI

CHRISTMAS 2011

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Rome and throughout the world!

Christ is born for us! Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth to the men and women whom he loves. May all people hear an echo of the message of Bethlehem which the Catholic Church repeats in every continent, beyond the confines of every nation, language and culture. The Son of the Virgin Mary is born for everyone; he is the Saviour of all.

This is how Christ is invoked in an ancient liturgical antiphon: “O Emmanuel, our king and lawgiver, hope and salvation of the peoples: come to save us, O Lord our God”. *Veni ad salvandum nos!* Come to save us! This is the cry raised by men and women in every age, who sense that by themselves they cannot prevail over difficulties and dangers. They need to put their hands in a greater and stronger hand, a hand which reaches out to them from on high. Dear brothers and sisters, this hand is Christ, born in Bethlehem of the Virgin Mary. He is the hand that God extends to humanity, to draw us out of the mire of sin and to set us firmly on rock, the secure rock of his Truth and his Love (cf. *Ps* 40:2).

This is the meaning of the Child’s name, the name which, by God’s will, Mary and Joseph gave him: he is named Jesus, which means “Saviour” (cf. *Mt* 1:21; *Lk* 1:31). He was sent by God the Father to save us above all from the evil deeply rooted in man and in history: the evil of separation from God, the prideful presumption of being self-sufficient, of trying to compete with God and to take his place, to decide what is good and evil, to be the master of life and death (cf. *Gen* 3:1-7). This is the great evil, the great sin, from which we human beings cannot save ourselves unless we rely on God’s help, unless we cry out to him: “*Veni ad salvandum nos!* – Come to save us!”

The very fact that we cry to heaven in this way already sets us aright; it makes us true to

ourselves: we are in fact those who cried out to God and were saved (cf. *Esth* [LXX] 10:3ff.). God is the Saviour; we are those who are in peril. He is the physician; we are the infirm. To realize this is the first step towards salvation, towards emerging from the maze in which we have been locked by our pride. To lift our eyes to heaven, to stretch out our hands and call for help is our means of escape, provided that there is Someone who hears us and can come to our assistance.

Jesus Christ is the proof that God has heard our cry. And not only this! God's love for us is so strong that he cannot remain aloof; he comes out of himself to enter into our midst and to share fully in our human condition (cf. *Ex* 3:7-12). The answer to our cry which God gave in Jesus infinitely transcends our expectations, achieving a solidarity which cannot be human alone, but divine. Only the God who is love, and the love which is God, could choose to save us in this way, which is certainly the lengthiest way, yet the way which respects the truth about him and about us: the way of reconciliation, dialogue and cooperation.

Dear brothers and sisters in Rome and throughout the world, on this Christmas 2011, let us then turn to the Child of Bethlehem, to the Son of the Virgin Mary, and say: "Come to save us!" Let us repeat these words in spiritual union with the many people who experience particularly difficult situations; let us speak out for those who have no voice.

Together let us ask God's help for the peoples of the Horn of Africa, who suffer from hunger and food shortages, aggravated at times by a persistent state of insecurity. May the international community not fail to offer assistance to the many displaced persons coming from that region and whose dignity has been sorely tried.

May the Lord grant comfort to the peoples of South-East Asia, particularly Thailand and the Philippines, who are still enduring grave hardships as a result of the recent floods.

May the Lord come to the aid of our world torn by so many conflicts which even today stain the earth with blood. May the Prince of Peace grant peace and stability to that Land where he chose to come into the world, and encourage the resumption of dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians. May he bring an end to the violence in Syria, where so much blood has already been shed. May he foster full reconciliation and stability in Iraq and Afghanistan. May he grant renewed vigour to all elements of society in the countries of North Africa and the Middle East as they strive to advance the common good.

May the birth of the Saviour support the prospects of dialogue and cooperation in Myanmar, in the pursuit of shared solutions. May the Nativity of the Redeemer ensure political stability to the countries of the Great Lakes Region of Africa, and assist the people of South Sudan in their commitment to safeguarding the rights of all citizens.

Dear Brothers and Sisters, let us turn our gaze anew to the grotto of Bethlehem. The Child whom

we contemplate is our salvation! He has brought to the world a universal message of reconciliation and peace. Let us open our hearts to him; let us receive him into our lives. Once more let us say to him, with joy and confidence: "*Veni ad salvandum nos!*"

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