



The Holy See

VISIT AT THE CAPITOLINE HILL

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

TO THE MAYOR AND THE MUNICIPAL ADMINISTRATORS OF ROME

Capitoline Hill, Rome

Seat of the municipal government

Monday, 9 March 2009

Mr Mayor,

Mr President of the Municipal Council,

Ladies and Gentlemen, Assessors and Councillors of the Municipality of Rome,

Distinguished Authorities,

Dear Friends,

As has been recalled, it is not the first time that a Pope has been welcomed with such warmth at this Senatorial Palace and has taken the floor in this solemn council hall, the meeting place of the most important representatives of the municipal administration. The annals of history first record the brief Visit of Blessed Pius IX to Piazza del Campidoglio, Capitoline Square, after his Visit to the Basilica of Ara Coeli on 16 September 1870. The Visit by Pope Paul VI, made on 16 April 1966, is much more recent and it was followed by that of my venerable Predecessor John Paul II, on 15 January 1998. These gestures witness to the affection and esteem that the Successors of Peter, Pastors of the Roman Catholic community and of the universal Church, have always felt for Rome, the centre of Latin and Christian civilization, a "welcoming mother of peoples" (cf. Prudentius, *Liber Peristephanon*, Poem 11, 191), and "a disciple of truth" (cf. Leo the Great, *Tract. septem et nonaginta*).

It is therefore with understandable emotion that I now take the floor during my Visit today. I speak first of all to express my gratitude, Mr Mayor, for the kind invitation to visit the Capitol which you addressed to me at the beginning of your mandate as Mayor of the City. I also thank you for the profound words interpreting the thoughts of those present with which you have welcomed me. I extend my greeting to the President of the Municipal Council, whom I thank for his noble sentiments, expressed also on behalf of his colleagues. I followed most attentively the reflections

of both the Mayor and the President and I could see in them the determination of the Administration to serve this city, pointing to its true and integral material, social and spiritual wellbeing. I offer a cordial greeting lastly to the municipal authorities and councillors, to the government representatives, to the authorities and to the important figures, as well as to all the Roman citizens.

With my presence on this hill today, the seat and emblem of the history and role of Rome, I am anxious to renew the assurance of the fatherly attention that the Bishop of the Catholic community pays not only to its members but also to all Romans and all who come to the Capital from various parts of Italy and the world for reasons of religion, tourism or work, or to settle, integrating themselves into the fabric of the City. I am here today to encourage the difficult task you have as Administrators at the service of this unique metropolis. I am here to share in the expectations and hopes of the inhabitants, and to listen to their worries and problems, of whom you make yourselves responsible interpreters in this Senatorial Palace. It is the natural and dynamic centre of the projects with which, in the third millennium, the "building Palace" of Rome is teeming. Mr Mayor, I recognized in your discourse the firm intention to work to ensure that Rome continues to be a beacon of life and freedom, of moral civilization and sustainable development, promoted with respect for the dignity of every human being and his or her religious faith. I wish to assure you and your collaborators that, as always, the Catholic Church will never let her active support be wanting for any cultural and social initiative aimed at promoting the authentic good of every person and of the City as a whole. The gift of the *Compendium of the Social Teaching of the Church*, which I offer with affection to the Mayor and the Administrators, is intended as a sign of this collaboration.

Mr Mayor, Rome has always been a welcoming City. Especially in recent centuries, it has opened its civil and ecclesiastical university institutes and research centres to students from every part of the world. Returning to their countries, they are later called to assume roles and offices of high responsibility in various sectors of society as well as in the Church. Today, this City of ours, like Italy and the whole of humanity, finds itself facing unheard-of cultural, social and economic challenges because of the profound transformations and numerous changes which have occurred in recent decades. Rome has become increasingly populated by people who come from other nations and belong to different cultures and religious traditions. Consequently it now has the features of a multi-racial and multi-religious metropolis, in which integration is sometimes difficult and complex. On the part of the Catholic community, the sincere contribution to finding ever more suitable ways to safeguard the fundamental rights of the person with respect for legality will never lessen. I am also convinced, as you yourself said, Mr Mayor, that by drawing new sap from the roots of its history modelled by ancient law and the Christian faith Rome will be able to find the strength to demand respect for the rules of civil coexistence from all and to reject every form of intolerance and discrimination.

Allow me furthermore to point out that episodes of violence, deplored by all, show a deeper unrest. I would say that they are signs of the true spiritual impoverishment that afflicts the human heart

today. The elimination of God and of his law as a condition for the achievement of human happiness has in no way reached its goal; on the contrary, it deprives human beings of the spiritual certainties and hope they need to face the daily difficulties and challenges. For example, when a wheel is disconnected from its central axle it loses its drive. Likewise, morals do not achieve their ultimate aim if they are not hinged on inspiration and submission to God, the source and judge of all good. In the face of the disturbing enfeeblement of the human and spiritual ideals that made Rome a "model" of civilization for the whole world, through the parish communities and other ecclesial structures the Church is becoming involved in a far-reaching educational effort, striving to make people, and in particular the new generations, discover those perennial values once again. In the post-modern era, if Rome wants to champion a new humanism centred on the question of the human being recognized in his full reality, it must recover its deepest soul, its civil and Christian roots. The human being cut off from God would be deprived of his transcendent vocation. Christianity brings a luminous message on the truth about man and the Church, which is the depository of this message, is aware of her responsibility with regard to contemporary culture.

How many other things I would like to say now! As Bishop of this City I cannot forget that even in Rome, because of the current economic crisis that I mentioned earlier, an increasing number of people are losing their jobs. They are finding themselves in such precarious conditions that sometimes they cannot cope with the financial commitments they have made; I am thinking, for example, of those buying or renting a house. Therefore, a unanimous effort between the various Institutions in order to help those who live in poverty is required. The Christian community, through the parishes and other charitable structures, is already involved in providing daily support for numerous families that are toiling to maintain a dignified standard of living and, as has recently happened, is ready to collaborate with the authorities responsible for the common good. In this case, too, the values of solidarity and generosity that are deeply rooted in the hearts of Romans can be sustained by the light of the Gospel, in order that all may reassume responsibility for the needs of those in the worst hardship, so that they may feel they belong to a single family. In fact, the greater each citizen's awareness is that he is personally responsible for the life and future of our City's inhabitants, the greater will be his confidence that he can surmount the difficulties of the present time.

And what can be said of families, children and youth? Thank you, Mr Mayor, because on the occasion of my Visit, you have offered me as a gift a sign of hope for youth, giving it my name, that of an elderly Pontiff who looks trustingly to the young people and prays for them every day. Families and youth can hope in a better future to the extent that individualism leaves room for sentiments of fraternal collaboration among all the members of civil society and of the Christian community. May this new institution also be an incentive for Rome to weave a social fabric of acceptance and respect, where the encounter between culture and faith, between social life and religious testimony cooperates to form communities that are truly free and enlivened by sentiments of peace. The "Observatory for religious freedom" which you have just mentioned will also be able to make a unique contribution to this.

Mr Mayor, dear friends, at the end of my Discourse, permit me to turn my gaze to the Madonna and Child, which for several centuries has watched maternally over the work of the Municipal Administration in this hall. I entrust to her each one of you, your work and the resolutions of good that motivate you. May you all be always in agreement at the service of this beloved city, in which the Lord has called me to carry out the episcopal ministry. Upon each one of you, I wholeheartedly invoke an abundance of divine Blessings, as I assure you all of my remembrance in prayer. Thank you for your hospitality!

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