



The Holy See

EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION AT THE parish
of San Salvatore in Lauro IN RomE

HOMILY OF POPE JOHN PAUL II

Sunday, 16 March 1997

1. *“Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (Jn 12:24).*

With these words, today’s liturgy invites us to prepare for the season of the Lord’s Passion, which we will enter next Sunday. Christ spoke them when some Greeks, who wished to approach him, asked Philip: “Sir, we wish to see Jesus” (Jn 12:21). Christ then delivered a speech whose contents at first glance seem difficult and obscure: “The hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified.... He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life” (Jn 12:23, 25).

Actually these words contain a summary of the essential meaning of the events of Holy Week. That “hour” in which the Son of man is to be glorified is the “hour” of his passion and death on the cross. Precisely in that “hour” the grain of wheat that has fallen into the earth, that is, the Son of God made man, will die to bear the priceless fruit of the redemption. In his death will lead to the triumph of life.

The Gospel passage proclaimed a few moments ago speaks of Jesus’ fear on the threshold of the paschal mystery. “Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’?” (Jn 12:27-28). This text seems almost to re-echo the prayer of Gethsemane, when Jesus, experiencing the drama of loneliness and fear, asks his Father to take away the chalice of suffering. At the same time, however, he agrees to fulfil his will. After having said: “Father, save me from this hour”, he immediately continues: “No, for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name” (Jn 12:27-28).

2. The second reading also speaks of the paschal mystery. It recalls how Christ “in the days of his flesh, ... offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard for his godly fear” (Heb 5:7). We might wonder: in what way was Christ heard, if he who could have saved him allowed him to undergo the tragic experience of Good Friday?

Further on in the holy text we find the answer: “Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and being made perfect he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him” (Heb 5:8-9). Christ was heard therefore as the Redeemer of the world, having become the source of eternal salvation for all who believe in him. This is made clear in the passage from St John: “If any one serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there shall my servant be also” (Jn 12:26).

3. Dear brothers and sisters of the parish of San Salvatore in Lauro, I am pleased to be among you today, to celebrate the Lord's day. I cordially greet the Cardinal Vicar, the Auxiliary Bishop for this area, your parish priest, Fr Antonio Tedeschi, and those who assist him, including — for so many years now — Bishop Luigi De Magistris, Regent of the Apostolic Penitentiary. I greet the representatives of the various groups and associations that are active in this community and all of you, dear parishioners, who have wanted to be present at this celebration.

A special thought goes to the president, chaplain and members of the Pious Sodality of Piceno, to Archbishop Sergio Sebastiani and Bishop Elio Sgreccia, also to all the people from the Marches region who are present here, linked by deep ties of faith and cultural tradition to this ancient and beautiful church. This church is a testimony to centuries of history and, above all, to the ancient devotion to the Blessed Virgin of Loreto, so venerated here. I address a special thought to Cardinal Pietro Palazzini.

Dear friends, yours is a small parish situated in the historical centre of Rome, and like many others surrounding you, in its pastoral activities it feels the effects of the phenomena typical of these city neighbourhoods, such as the lack of new families and young people, the reduced number of residents caused by the high cost of housing and by the numerous shops and offices that have gradually replaced it, the scattering of the faithful in the many neighbouring churches of the city centre. All this almost inevitably affects the parish's pastoral care. While it is necessary to continue the ordinary services for the few residents in the area who are involved in keeping the characteristics of old Rome alive, and to provide human and spiritual assistance to all those who serve the families in the area, you must commit yourselves to a renewed pastoral care that responds in an increasingly suitable way to the new requirements of the area.

4. I am thinking, for example, of what you already admirably do when you host arts and crafts fairs and other similar displays, which appeal to a large number of people in the parish territory. Keeping your beautiful church always open even in the evening so that it can welcome visitors up

to a late hour, offering them the chance to participate in a carefully-prepared liturgy and to receive the sacrament of Reconciliation, is a practical, effective way to evangelize.

On the occasion of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, the centre of Rome will be visited by many pilgrims. Having the opportunity to visit churches that are hospitable and ready to offer special spiritual and cultural experiences will be an important occasion for meeting the Church in Rome, and for the faithful of the city it will be a stimulus to create new ways of proclaiming the Gospel, undertaking that widespread missionary work that the city mission is increasingly meant to be.

I am also aware that you are moving in this direction in your parish. May the city mission, which already spurs you to work together in pastoral zones, help and foster the efforts you are making for an increased and more incisive evangelizing presence in Rome.

5. *“The days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant”* (Jer 31:31).

With this evocative vision of the New Covenant, the prophet Jeremiah, in the first reading proclaimed a few moments ago, announces the future renewal of the relations between God and his people through the sacrifice of Christ.

The prophetic text bases this decisive saving intervention of God on the gift of a new law: “Says the Lord: I will place my law within them, and write it upon their hearts; I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (Jer 31:33).

In order for God's definitive law, that is, the Decalogue completed by Jesus in the commandment of love, to be written in the human heart, that Sacrifice, to which the liturgy of these days is leading us, was necessary. In the light of Christ's passion and death, even the words of King David which we heard in the *responsorial psalm* acquire a new and deeper meaning: “A clean heart create for me, O God, and a steadfast spirit renew within me. Cast me not out from your presence, and your holy spirit take not from me” (Ps 51 [50]:12-13).

These are words that find their fulfilment in the paschal mystery. In fact, Redemption coincides with the new creation because, through it, the joy of salvation is restored to the sinner and he is given the gladness of the Holy Spirit.

As we are now hastening towards the passion, death and resurrection of the Lord, let us make our own the prayer of the prophet David:

Lord give us too the joy of being saved; a generous heart sustain in all your faithful.

Renew the steadfastness of our spirit, so that we can teach your ways to our brothers and sisters (cf. Ps 51 [50]:13-14) and that everyone may return to you and enjoy together the fruits of your

Redemption.

Amen.

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