



The Holy See

VISIT TO THE PARISH OF SAINT ELIZABETH AND SAINT ZACHARY IN ROME

HOMILY OF POPE JOHN PAUL II

Sunday, 26 October 1997

1. *"The Lord has done great things for us" (Ps 125:3).*

The refrain of the responsorial psalm aptly summarizes the content of the Word of God offered us by today's liturgy.

As we heard in the Gospel, Jesus did great things for Bartimaeus, the blind man of Jericho, who through his miraculous intervention regained his sight (cf. Mk 10:52). God did great things for the descendants of Jacob, freeing them from slavery in Egypt and bringing them into the promised land. When a new slavery befell the chosen people because of their infidelity, God liberated the people of Israel from exile in Babylon and led them back to the land of their fathers.

Referring to the great events of salvation history, the responsorial psalm proclaims: "When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream.

Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy" (Ps 125:1-2).

The *magnalia Dei* of the Old Covenant foreshadow the mystery of the Incarnation, the supreme intervention of God not only for Israel, but for all people. "For God so loved the world", writes St John, "that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16). The only-begotten Son of God, one in being with the Father, became man by the work of the Holy Spirit. He assumed our human nature from Mary, the chosen daughter of Zion, and brought about the Redemption of all humanity.

2. "You are a priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedek" (Heb 5:6). Jesus is the High Priest of

the New and Eternal Covenant. The old priesthood, handed down from the descendants of Aaron, Moses' brother, gives way to the true and perfect priesthood of Christ. We read in the Letter to the Hebrews: "Every High Priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins" (5:1).

Christ's entire life has priestly value. However, his priesthood is manifested in the fullness of the paschal mystery. On Golgotha he offers himself to the Father in the one, bloody and perfect sacrifice. Thus he brought to definitive fulfilment the prophecy addressed to Melchizedek: "he did this once for all when he offered up himself" (Heb 7:27). On the eve of his death, he anticipated the memorial of this sacrifice under the appearances of consecrated bread and wine. His sacrificial act thus became the sacrament of the New Covenant, the Church's Eucharist. Every time we celebrate or participate in Holy Mass, we must gratefully proclaim the words of today's psalm: "The Lord has done great things for us"!

3. Today let us repeat this song together, dear brothers and sisters of Sts Elizabeth and Zachary Parish!

I came to visit your young community and to celebrate the Lord's Day with you. I greet you all cordially and I thank you for your warm welcome. In particular, I greet the Cardinal Vicar, the Auxiliary Bishop of this area and your parish priest, Fr Giorgio Cara, who deserves an applause. He has said many good things about you. It is obvious that he loves his people, all the families, the many children you see in the parish; he loves everyone without exception. I also greet the assistant priests who come from Africa, the religious and the laity, young people and adults, who help in the parish's life. I also extend my affectionate thoughts to the inhabitants of the entire neighbourhood of Prima Porta.

Yours is a recently founded parish: it was established in 1985, even if it began 10 years earlier, when many families from other areas came to settle here. Thanks also to the Sisters of the Immaculate who assisted you until 1993, after a hesitant start your community grew remarkably to the point that it now numbers 9,000 souls. It has gradually been organized and has experienced rapid growth especially in the areas of catechesis and catechist formation, the liturgy and missionary activity, with significant experiences of family prayer groups.

Together with you I give thanks to God for these encouraging fruits, and I sincerely hope that you may soon have the beautiful parish church you long for as the spiritual centre of this constantly growing neighbourhood.

The *City Mission*, which in Lent 1998 will involve all parishes, will be a further incentive to cultivating your apostolic and missionary zeal. In this regard, I am aware that last summer some young people had a fruitful missionary experience in El Salvador and in NorthEast Brazil. I am pleased, and I hope that the commitment to proclaiming the dead and risen Lord in every milieu

will grow in everyone.

4. Dear brothers and sisters, in the context of the City Mission, on Sunday 30 November next I will have the joy of presenting a crucifix and entrusting the missionary mandate to more than 13,000 of the faithful who are preparing for this apostolic endeavour. I will do this, please God, during the Eucharistic celebration opening the second year of immediate preparation for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. For the success of this important ecclesial activity, which involves the entire diocesan community, I count on the generous contribution of everyone, especially your *young people*, called to be *apostles of Christ among their peers*. The Pastoral Visit of the Auxiliary Bishops to the communities of young people, which has been going on for the last few weeks, aims precisely at emphasizing the importance of their contribution and witness.

Christian families must also be active beside the young people. This is the reason why the Diocese of Rome is dedicating great attention to the pastoral care of the family this year. Unfortunately there are many families in difficulty, but it is comforting to see how in Rome and Italy this institution still has first place in the scale of values. Therefore, the Christian family can and must play an important part in helping families which, for various reasons, are going through difficult times. To carry out this task, it is called to be increasingly aware of its vocation and mission: as the *domestic Church*, the family is the place from which the Gospel radiates. The family that lives the Gospel, as my venerable Predecessor Pope Paul VI recalled, becomes the evangelizer of many families and of its surroundings. In other words, it becomes authentically missionary (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangeli nuntiandi*, n. 71).

Dear young people, dear families, be apostles to this city of ours. Be sowers of Christ's truth and love by your consistent Gospel witness and your active participation in the City Mission.

5. The responsorial psalm reminds us that *"those who sow with tears reap with shouts of joy"* (Ps 125:5). The task that Jesus asks of us may seem arduous, but he assures us of his help and support. *He is with us and is acting for us*.

Sure of his love, we can turn to him with trust. Just as after the planting season the farmer tastes the joy of the harvest, so God will enable us all to return rejoicing, bringing the fruits of our missionary work (cf. Ps 125:6). He is the Father who fills his children with joy.

In seeing the gifts of his grace, we can repeat with a thankful heart: "The Lord has done great things for us". Yes, the Lord never ceases to work wonders for us. Always!

Blessed be his holy name, now and forever. Amen!

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