



The Holy See

VESPERS AND TE DEUM AT ST IGNATIUS CHURCH IN ROME

EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Thursday, 31 December 1998

1. The Church in Rome and in every part of the world gathers this evening to sing the Te Deum, as the year 1998 draws to a close.

Te Deum laudamus: te Dominum confitemur.

Te aeternum Patrem omnis terra veneratur.

We now stand on the threshold of 1999, the year that will take us into the Great Jubilee: it is dedicated to the heavenly Father, according to the Trinitarian programme which marks these last three years of the 20th century and the second millennium. The Trinitarian cadence of the Christian's daily life is echoed in the formula which ends every liturgical prayer: "Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever".

God the Father, ineffable mystery, was revealed to us through his Son, Jesus Christ, who was born, died and rose for us and sanctifies us by the power of the Holy Spirit. In the Te Deum we solemnly acclaim the Blessed Trinity with the venerable words of a long tradition:

Patrem immensae maiestatis; venerandum tuum verum et unicum Filium; Sanctum quoque Paraclitum Spiritum.

Father of life and holiness, our Father, who art in heaven! Father whom "... no one knows except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (Mt 11:27).

He is the Father of Jesus Christ and our Father.

2. The biblical text we have just heard reminds us that, in addition to sending us his Only-begotten Son "in the fullness of time", God has also "sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"" (Gal 4:4-7).

Abba! Father! In these words, which the Spirit instils in the hearts of believers, we hear the echo of Jesus' invocation, just as the disciples heard it on his own lips. By making them our own, we become keenly aware of the reality of our adoption as sons in Christ, the eternal and Only-begotten Son of the Father, made man in Mary's womb.

This evening, as we greet the end of 1998, we come before the Father to thank him for all the good he has bestowed on us during the past 12 months. We come to him to ask forgiveness for our sins and for those of others, and to proclaim with trusting abandonment: "Holy God, Holy and Strong, Holy Immortal One, have mercy on us!". We say to him:

"Blessed are you, Lord,
 Father in heaven,
 who, in your infinite mercy,
 stooped down to us in our distress
 and gave us Jesus, your Son,
 born of a woman,
 to be our saviour and friend,
 our brother and Redeemer"

(Prayer for the Third Year of Preparation for the Great Jubilee).

3. During this moment of prayer, my thoughts turn with particular affection to the residents of our city. I entrust them to the Lord, along with their families, parishes and public institutions. I pray especially for those weighed down by hardship and suffering, who find it difficult to look at the new year with hope. I extend my cordial greetings of peace and goodwill for 1999, now at our door, to everyone.

I would also like affectionately to greet those who are attending this traditional spiritual gathering at year's end, beginning with the Cardinal Vicar, the Auxiliary Bishops of Rome and the other prelates who have wished to join us for this celebration. I extend a special greeting to Fr Kolvenbach, Superior General of the Society of Jesus, and to the Jesuit Fathers to whose care is entrusted this church filled with memories of holiness.

I express my deep gratitude to the Mayor of Rome and the members of the Capitoline Administration for their participation and for their gift of a votive chalice, as I recall with great joy the visit the Lord granted me to make to the Capitoline at the beginning of 1998. I extend my greetings to the Prefect of Rome, who took up this important responsibility a few days ago, to the President of the Regional Board of Lazio and to all the civil, military and religious authorities who have gathered here.

4. How should we thank God for the abundant gifts he has given us during the year now drawing to a close? I would like to give him special thanks this evening, together with you, for what he has accomplished in our diocesan community. I am thinking of my parish visits, valuable and enriching occasions for fruitful pastoral gatherings. Over the past 20 years I have visited 278 parishes, finding fervent faith and good works in each of them, thanks to the efforts of the priests,

religious and lay people from Rome or from other parts of Italy and the world.

I thank the Lord for the City Mission, which this year has been especially marked by visits to families. Going into homes, the missionaries received a positive welcome on the whole, and found significant evidence of faith even among those who are not regular church-goers. I hope that these pastoral contacts with each family will be followed up with house blessings or other suitable activities that have already borne fruit in many Roman parishes.

This evening I would like to give thanks to the Lord especially for the thousands of missionaries who have been working now for two years and are a providential resource for giving a growing apostolic thrust to diocesan ministry, particularly in view of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000.

A year from now we will have already entered the Holy Year and numerous pilgrims will be arriving from every corner of the world. I deeply hope that they will be welcomed by a Church which is alive and rich in religious fervour, a Church which is generous and sensitive to the requirements of her brothers and sisters, especially the poorest and neediest.

5. Looking over the past year, I cannot fail to remember the hardships and problems which in Rome, too, have marked the lives of many of our brothers and sisters. I am thinking of the families who are struggling to make ends meet; of minors in difficulty and young people with no prospects for the future; of the sick, the elderly and those who live alone; of the neglected, the homeless and those who feel rejected by society. May the new year bring them serenity and hope. Thanks to broad collaboration and to social, economic and political trends that are more open to initiative and change, attitudes of ever greater trust and creativity will be encouraged in the city.

In a special way, I would like to invite believers once again to continue their commitment to reflection and planning, so that Rome, "by relying on its spiritual and civil mission and making the most of its human, cultural and religious heritage, can further its civil and economic development to the benefit of the whole Italian nation and the world" (*Letter on the Gospel of Work*, 8 December 1998, n. 8). I hope that our metropolis will be deeply renewed in all the dimensions of her social and spiritual life for the forthcoming Jubilee.

6. This hope of mine becomes a prayer that the Lord will make everyone's efforts bear fruit. To him we commend all our desires and plans. To him we offer our praise and our filial, trusting prayer:

"To you, Father of life,
eternal source of all that is,
highest good and everlasting light,
be honour and glory, praise and thanksgiving,
with the Son and with the Spirit,
for ages unending. Amen"

(*Prayer for the Third Year of Preparation for the Great Jubilee*).

