



# The Holy See

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SOLEMNITY OF MARY, MOTHER OF GOD  
WORLD DAY OF PEACE

## **HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II**

*1 January 1999*

1. *Christus heri et hodie, Principium et Finis, Alpha et Omega...*

"Christ, yesterday and today, the beginning and the end, Alpha, and Omega. All time belongs to him, and all the ages; to him be glory and power, through every age for ever" (*Roman Missal*, Preparation of the Easter Candle).

Every year during the Easter Vigil the Church renews this solemn acclamation of Christ, the Lord of time. We also proclaim this truth on New Year's Day, as we pass from "*yesterday*" to "*today*": "*yesterday*", when we gave thanks to God at the end of the old year; "*today*", as we greet the new year that is beginning. *Heri et hodie*. We celebrate Christ who, as Scripture says, is "the same yesterday and today and for ever" (Heb 13:8). He is the Lord of history, the centuries and millenniums belong to him.

As we begin 1999, the last year before the Great Jubilee, it is as though the mystery of history were unveiled before us in greater depth. Precisely for this reason, the Church has wished to impress the Trinitarian sign of the living God's presence upon the three years of immediate preparation for the Jubilee.

2. The Octave of Christmas ends on the first day of the new year, which is dedicated to the Blessed Virgin, venerated as the Mother of God. The Gospel reminds us that she "kept all these things, pondering them in her heart" (Lk 2:19). So she did in Bethlehem, on Golgotha at the foot of the cross, and on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit descended in the Upper Room.

And so she does today too. The Mother of God and of human beings keeps in her heart all of humanity's problems, great and difficult, and meditates upon them. The *Alma Redemptoris Mater* walks with us and guides us with motherly tenderness towards the future. Thus she helps humanity cross all the "thresholds" of the years, the centuries, the millenniums, by sustaining their hope in the One who is the Lord of history.

3. *Heri et hodie*. Yesterday and today. "Yesterday" invites us to look back. When we turn our attention to the events of this century now drawing to a close, the two World Wars appear before our eyes: cemeteries, the graves of the fallen, families destroyed, weeping and desperation, misery and suffering. How can we forget the death camps, how can we forget the children of Israel cruelly exterminated, how can we forget the holy martyrs: Fr Maximilian Kolbe, Sr Edith Stein and so many others?

However, our century is also the century of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, whose 50th anniversary was recently celebrated. Precisely in view of this event, in the traditional Message for today's World Day of Peace, I wanted to recall that the secret of true peace lies in respect for human rights. "Recognition of the innate dignity of all the members of the human family ... is the foundation of liberty, justice and peace in the world" (n. 3).

The Second Vatican Council, which prepared the Church to enter the third millennium, stressed that the world, the theatre of the history of the human race, was freed from the slavery of sin by the crucified and risen Christ, so that "she might be fashioned anew according to God's design and brought to her fulfilment" (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 2). This is how believers look on the world of our day, as they gradually advance towards the threshold of the Year 2000.

4. The eternal Word, in becoming Man, entered the world and accepted it in order to redeem it. Thus the world is not only marked by the terrible legacy of sin, but is first and foremost a world saved by Christ, the Son of God, crucified and risen. Jesus is the Redeemer of the world, the Lord of history. *Eius sunt tempora et saecula*: all time and all the ages belong to him. For this reason we believe that, by entering the third millennium with Christ, we will co-operate in transforming the world redeemed by him, *mundus creatus, mundus redemptus*.

In various ways, unfortunately, humanity falls under the influence of evil. But spurred by grace, it continues to rise again by the power of the Redemption; it walks towards the good. It walks towards Christ, in accordance with God the Father's plan.

"Jesus Christ, the beginning and the end, Alpha, and Omega. All time belongs to him, and all the ages".

We begin this new year in his name. Through Mary's intercession may we be his faithful disciples, so that by our words and deeds we may glorify and honour him through all ages and for ever:

*Ipsi gloria et imperium per universa aeternitatis saecula. Amen!*

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