



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT TO THE ROMAN PARISH OF ST. ANGELA MERICI

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Sunday, 27 May 2001

1. *"God mounts his throne to shouts of joy"* (Responsorial Psalm, Response). These words of today's liturgy lead us into the Solemnity of the Ascension. We relive the moment when Christ returns to the Father, after completing his earthly mission. This feast is the culmination of Christ's glorification at Easter. It is also the immediate preparation for the gift of the Holy Spirit who will come at Pentecost. The Ascension of the Lord should not therefore be taken as an isolated episode but as an integral part of the Easter Mystery.

Indeed the risen Jesus does not leave his disciples definitively; rather, he begins a new kind of relationship with them. If, from the physical and earthly viewpoint, he is no longer present, his invisible presence is nonetheless intensified, reaching a depth and breadth that are absolutely new.

Through the action of the promised Holy Spirit, Jesus was to be present where he had taught his disciples to recognize him: in the Church, the community of all who were to believe in him, called to carry out a never-ending evangelizing mission down the ages in the Gospel, and the sacraments.

2. Dear brothers and sisters of St Angela Merici Parish! I am delighted to celebrate today's Solemnity of the Ascension with you today. I greet you all with affection. I first greet the Cardinal Vicar, the Auxiliary Bishop of this sector, your beloved parish priest, Fr Guido Peresini, and the priests who work with him. Those who addressed cordial words to me on behalf of you all at the beginning of this celebration deserve special thanks.

My thoughts then turn to the religious of the five congregations of consecrated women institutes

active in the parish, to the members of the Pastoral Council and to all who in various capacities take part in and promote parish life. I embrace with affection each one of you present here, dear brothers and sisters, and those who live in the neighbourhood.

3. Today's liturgy urges us to look up into Heaven as the Apostles did at the moment of the Ascension, to be then credible witnesses of the Risen One on earth (cf Acts 1,11), collaborating with him in extending the Kingdom of God among men. We are also invited to meditate on the mandate which Jesus, before ascending into Heaven, entrusts to the disciples: to preach conversion and the forgiveness of sins to all the nations (cf Lk 24,47). This mandate prompts us to reflect on all that our Diocese, through the experiences of the Diocesan Synod and the City Mission, as well as the events which have taken place during the recent Jubilee, is seeking to carry out in a way that is faithful to Christ, so as to have an incisive effect on society and contemporary culture.

We will also attempt to respond to the same mandate of Christ with the Diocesan Convention which will take place from 7 to 9 June next, to review the results of the City Mission and to set up a permanent missionary ministry. A ministry, that is, which is destined for all, to teach the faithful to strive for holiness so that each may fulfil his own mission in the world in accord with his own specific vocation. I urge you all to pray for the success of this convention and to prepare yourselves to obey promptly the pastoral guidelines that will emerge from it. In this way, your parish community will also join with fresh enthusiasm the missionary journey which the Church of Rome is undertaking.

4. Your parish, with a population of over 5,000, is undergoing a profound social transformation like the entire city of Rome and perceives the urgent need to adapt its pastoral action to the changed requirements of the people. This is a challenge to which you are already seeking to give concrete responses. You are particularly concerned to meet the needs of the many situations of poverty that exist in this neighbourhood and to proclaim the "Gospel of love" with actions. I am thinking, for example of those who come from countries outside the European Community, who are often unemployed and prevented from living a dignified life. I am thinking of many elderly people who feel their loneliness acutely when their physical strength and good health begin to fail.

I would like to extend my fraternal greeting to all who are in a condition of hardship, and I invite you, dear friends, to be beside them all the time. In this regard, I thank you for what you are already doing. I am especially pleased that you have set up the *Caritas* Centre, which is intended as a sign of your response to the immediate needs of those who are all too often forgotten.

Continue with courage and trust, knowing that you are not alone in this effort. You are supported by the whole Diocese which, thanks to the experience of the Great Jubilee, has grown considerably in communion and is ready to carry out more effective and renewed missionary work in our metropolis.

5. All the members of Christ's Mystical Body are called to make their own contribution to your action of apostolic commitment and ecclesial renewal. I am thinking especially of you, dear young people. Your parish community, during the 15th World Youth Day, hosted at least 1,500 young men and women from all over the world. Thus you could experience the enthusiasm and spiritual vitality that flowed from those days of grace. With that same spirit, continue to witness to Christ in your families, at school and in the contexts of daily life. Meet your peers with the same joy and be welcoming and open to them. Further, you will also be able to do a lot for the elderly. It is well known that a bond is often established between the young and the old which can be an excellent way to deepen the faith in the light of their experience. The elderly, in turn, can draw from you the fresh enthusiasm that is typical of your age, to live the autumn of their lives better. Thus a useful exchange of gifts occurs for the benefit of the whole community. May reciprocal understanding and mutual cooperation among everyone be the permanent hallmark of your family and parish life.

6. "I [will] send the promise of my Father upon you" (Lk 24,49). Here Jesus is speaking of his Spirit, the Holy Spirit. Like the disciples, we too are preparing to receive this gift on the solemnity of Pentecost. It is the mysterious action of the Spirit which alone can make us new creatures; alone his mysterious power puts us in the condition of proclaiming God's wonders. We should not fear, therefore; do not let us withdraw into ourselves! Rather, let us readily and willingly collaborate with him so that the salvation offered by God to each person in Christ may lead all humanity to the Father.

Let us wait with Mary for the descent of the Paraclete, like the disciples in the Upper Room. As I arrived at your church I saw a pillar bearing Our Lady's image, with the words, "Do not pass this place without greeting Mary". Let us always follow this advice. May Mary to whom we trustfully turn, especially in this month of May, help us to be worthy disciples of her Son and make us his courageous witnesses in the world. As Queen of our hearts, may she make of all believers one family, united in love and peace.