



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT IN FROSINONE

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Sunday, 16 September 2001

1. Give us, Father, the joy of your pardon (cf. *Responsorial Psalm*).

The joy of your pardon: this is the "good news" that the liturgy makes resound among us today. *Pardon is the joy of God even before it becomes the joy of man.* God rejoices in welcoming the repentant sinner; indeed, he himself, the Father of infinite mercy, "*dives in misericordia*", arouses in the human heart the hope of forgiveness and the joy of reconciliation.

With this news of comfort and peace, I come to you, brothers and sisters of the beloved Church in Frosinone-Veroli-Ferentino, to repay the visit that you made to me in St Peter's Square last 2 December, on the occasion of your Jubilee pilgrimage. I thank divine Providence for bringing me among you.

I am grateful to your Bishop, Salvatore Boccaccio, for the warm greeting he has offered me on your behalf. May the Lord reward with abundant fruit his pastoral zeal! With him, I am pleased to greet the Bishop emeritus, Angelo Cella, and the Cardinals and bishops present, as well as the priests concelebrating, and I assure of my special prayer the elderly or sick who are united with us in spirit. I greet the Italian Government representatives and the regional, provincial and municipal authorities, with special gratitude to the Mayor and Administration of Frosinone. To each one of you, brothers and sisters who are gathered here, I extend my cordial greetings and sincere thanks for your warm welcome.

2. "*God is greater than our hearts*". So we sang in the Gospel acclamation. If in the First Reading Moses proves that he *knows God's heart* and can implore forgiveness for his unfaithful people (cf. Ex 32,11-13), it is today's Gospel that fully introduces us to the mystery of God's mercy: Jesus

reveals to all of us the countenance of God, enabling us to know intimately *the heart of the Father*, who is ready to rejoice when his lost son returns.

The Apostle Paul is also a privileged witness of divine mercy: as was proclaimed in the Second Reading, in writing to his faithful collaborator, Timothy, he holds up his own conversion as proof that Christ came into the world to save sinners (cf. I Tm 1,15-16).

This is the truth that the Church never tires of proclaiming: *God loves us with an infinite love*. He gave to humanity his Only-begotten Son who died on the Cross for the remission of our sins. Believing in Jesus therefore means recognizing him as the Saviour to whom we can say, from the depths of our hearts: "You are *my hope*" and, with all our brethren, "You are *our hope*".

3. "*Jesus our hope!*". Dear friends, I know that this expression is now familiar to you. Indeed, it is the theme of your diocese's pastoral plan for the coming years. How I hope that my visit will help to impress this certainty more deeply on your hearts! The commitment, plans and work of each and every community must become a Gospel witness that is rooted in *the joyful hope of God's love and forgiveness!*

God's forgiveness! May this joyful announcement that in a special way today's world needs live at the heart of your lives, dear *priests*, who are called to be ministers of divine mercy, which is expressed in the pardon of sins in its highest degree. I wished to dedicate the Letter to Priests for last Holy Thursday to the sacrament of Reconciliation. Therefore, in spirit, I once again entrust this message to you, dear brothers in the priesthood, imploring for each of you and for the entire presbyterate the superabundance of grace of which the Apostle Paul spoke (cf. I Tm 1,14).

As for you, *men and women religious*, by your example may you radiate the joy of those who have experienced the mystery of God's love, expressed in the Gospel acclamation: "We know and believe the love God has for us" (cf. I Jn 4,16).

Meditating, loving and reflection on the Gospel means listening to the Word of the Lord

4. In our time we urgently need to proclaim Christ, Redeemer of man, so that his love may be known by all and may spread in every direction. The Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 has been a providential opportunity to announce him. But we must continue on this path. At the closing of the Holy Year, I repeated to the Church and to the world Christ's invitation to Peter: "*Duc in altum - Put out into the deep*" (Lk 5,4).

I renew this invitation to you, people of the Diocese of Frosinone-Veroli-Ferentino, so that it may guide you in a *courageous spiritual renewal*, to become a concrete pastoral plan. Build your present and your future keeping your eyes fixed on Jesus. *He is all*: all for the Church, all for man's salvation. With the Jubilee, the universal Church set out to seek the face of Christ. She must be more conscious of the need, the passion of contemplating the light that comes from that

face to reflect it in her own daily journey: Jesus-Son of God; Jesus-the Eucharist; Jesus-Charity. Jesus our hope! Jesus, all for us.

May *strong periods of study and reflection on the Word of God* be multiplied in parish communities. Meditating, studying and loving Sacred Scripture means humbly and attentively listening to the Lord, so that the community may grow around the table of his Word: it enlightens approaches and choices, points to the goals to strive for, but, first and foremost, it kindles faith in souls, feeds hope and invigorates the desire to proclaim the Good News to one and all. This is the *new evangelization* for which your diocesan community has set up a special "pastoral centre".

5. Dear brothers and sisters! May the heart and guide of your spiritual and apostolic journey *be the Eucharist*. Indeed, sacramental life is the source of grace and salvation for the Church. *Everything begins with Christ-the Eucharist*, everything returns to the living Christ, heart of the world, heart of the diocesan and parish community. If you succeed, as I hope you will, in putting Christ at the centre of your lives, you will find not only that he asks each one of you personally to accept him, but to offer, give, dispense, and communicate him to others. You should do this in his name as "Good Samaritans" among the needy, the poor, the most underprivileged, and the many immigrants who have arrived in this region from far-away countries. You will find that all the pastoral activity of centres "for worship and sanctification" and for "*ministeriality* and the witness of charity" springs from the overflowing source of holiness that is the mystery of the Eucharist that calls everyone to aspire to holiness.

Walking in the footsteps of the *men and women saints of this region of the Ciociaria*, you too have set yourselves the fundamental goal of becoming holy, just as your heavenly Father is holy, as his Son Jesus Christ is holy and as the Spirit who dwells in our hearts is holy. And one becomes holy with prayer, with participation in the Eucharist, with works of charity, with the witness of a good life that is humble and generous.

6. I would like to address a special word to *parents*. Dear mothers and fathers, show your children by your own dedication that God is good and greatly loving. Show them with an honest and hard-working life that holiness is the "normal" way for Christians.

On Sunday, 21 October, I will have the joy of raising a couple, a Roman husband and wife to the honour of the altars: the married couple, Luigi and Maria Beltrame Quattrocchi. Their beatification will be celebrated in the context of the National Meeting for Families organized by the Italian Bishops' Conference in St Peter's Square, Rome, on Saturday afternoon, 20, and on Sunday, 21 October. To both these events, in which I wish to take part personally, I invite the bishops, priests and all Italian families, especially those of the Lazio region in which the two new blessed lived.

They will be an opportunity for us to reflect on *the vocation to holiness of Christian families* and at the same time, to acquire a greater knowledge of the social role of families and to ask institutions

to protect and promote the family with proper laws and norms.

Diocese of Frosinone-Veroli-Ferentino, be a family of saints! In this beloved land of Ciociaria, the home of famous figures and generous servants of the Gospel, may you be the "salt of the earth" and "light of the world" (Mt 5,13-14).

May Mary, Mother of the Church accompany you with her intercession so that, just as you prayed intensely to prepare for this pastoral visit, you may continue to be a lively community, firm in faith, united in hope and persevering in charity.

Amen.

At the end of Mass and before praying the Angelus, the Holy Father addressed a few words to the young people.

I cannot leave without first addressing a special greeting to you, young people of Ciociaria, who wanted to offer me this pleasant and lovely improvisation. I thank the two young people who have expressed your sentiments, sharing with me your enthusiasm and the desire to look at life with confidence, without allowing yourselves to be discouraged by difficulties.

Dear young people, remember! Jesus Christ, "our hope" is a sure compass to guide you on your journey. Look to him and trust in him, advancing courageously on the path to holiness. Continue without hesitation, along with the entire diocesan community, under the guidance of your bishop and priests. The Lord is counting on each one of you; he wants you to *play the lead in the civilization of life and love*. Help one another to be witnesses of the Gospel and apostles among your peers.

I greet you individually and make an appointment with you, at least in spirit, for the *great meeting of the Christian youth of the world* which, please God, will take place in July next year, in Toronto, for World Youth Day. Prepare for this great youth meeting, which has henceforth become, as it were, a formative itinerary for thousands and thousands of young Catholics of every continent. Prepare yourselves for it with prayer and make sure that you take advantage of each day to grow in getting to know and love Christ and in serving in a concrete way your brothers and sisters.

The Pope follows you with prayer and blesses you with affection.

