



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT TO THE ROMAN PARISH
OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY, MOTHER OF GOD

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Sunday, 11 November 2001

1. *"He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, all live for him" (Lk 20,38).*

On 2nd November, we celebrated the Commemoration of all the Faithful Departed. The Liturgy of the 32nd Sunday of ordinary time returns again to this mystery, and invites us to reflect on the comforting reality of the resurrection of the dead. Biblical and Christian tradition, based on the Word of God, affirms with certainty that, after this earthly existence, a future immortality awaits the human person. It is not a generic affirmation, which intends to meet the aspiration of human beings for life without end. Faith in the resurrection of the dead is founded on the fidelity of God, as the Gospel today reminds us, God who is not the God of the dead, but of the living, who communicates to those who trust in him the same life he possesses in its fullness.

2. *"We will be satisfied, Lord, when we contemplate your countenance!" (Respons. Psalm).*

The refrain of the responsorial psalm propels us into life beyond death, which is the goal and full realization of our pilgrimage here on earth. In the First Testament we witness a progression from the obscure survival of human souls in *sheol* to the more explicit doctrine of the resurrection of the dead. The Book of Daniel (cf *Dn* 12,2-3) and the Second Book of Maccabees, which we heard in the first reading, all witness to it. In an age in which the chosen people were fiercely persecuted, seven brothers with their mother did not hesitate to face together suffering and martyrdom so that they might not fail in their faithfulness to the God of the Covenant. They conquered in the terrible trial because they were sustained by the expectation of the *"fulfillment of the hope of being raised up again by him"* (2 *Mc* 7,14). While we admire the example of the seven brothers in the Book of Maccabees, we firmly renew our faith in the resurrection of the dead and in the face of critical contemporary approaches. It is a fundamental point of Christian doctrine that sheds a comforting

light on the whole of earthly existence.

3. Dearly beloved Brothers and Sisters of the Parish of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, with great joy I am happy to be welcomed by your parish community, which meets in the Don Orione Centre of Monte Mario, where I had the joy of visiting you fifteen years ago. I am happy to return among you and to greet you cordially.

Above all, I am happy to see the Cardinal Vicar and the Auxiliary Bishop of the sector. I am also happy to see the General Director of the Sons of Divine Providence with the Provincial Director. I greet your zealous parish priest, Don Savino Lombardi, the parochial vicars, the Community of the Theological Institute, and all the religious who belong to the family of Don Orione, and work in this vast complex in the service of the poor. I greet your collaborators, the volunteers and the laity who are occupied with many pastoral and social activities. I greet the women religious of five Institutes who live in the area. Such a rich array of charisms and consecrated persons constitute a great gift for the whole Parish.

I affectionately embrace all of you young men who live in the Don Orione Institute. You are the heart of the Work in which the spirit of the Founder is well reflected. I also greet the sick, the persons who live alone, the elderly and all those who live in the area.

4. Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ! I know that you prepared for the visit today by reflecting together on the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio ineunte*. Listen to Christ's invitation to Peter, "Put out into the deep" (Lk 5,4). Put out into the deep and do not be afraid, parish of the *Mother of God*, breathing the desire to serve Christ and to witness to his Gospel of salvation! In this vast apostolic effort, all who work in a variety of pastoral sectors, from catechesis to liturgy, from culture to charity should know how to work together.

Many professionals, journalists and university lecturers live in your parish. This offers you the opportunity to attempt a useful pastoral experience, involving so many experts and agents of communication in a journey of reflection and exploration of the fundamental themes of Christian doctrine. The relation between faith and life constitutes one of the more complicated challenges for the new evangelization today.

In the Centre, which is the heart of the Parish, we experience the impact of Blessed Luigi Orione, untiring apostle of charity and fidelity to the Church. Beloved, follow in his footsteps, imitating his faithful obedience to the Church, in the indefatigable search for the good of souls, by taking care of the poor and the needy. The "old" and the "new" poverty's live alongside each other, and await your generous service.

5. I dedicate a special reflection to you, young men and women. I know that many of you were occupied in preparing and celebrating the World Youth Day during August last year. At the end of

the unforgettable Prayer Vigil of Tor Vergata, I invited the young people of the world to be "the sentinels of the morning at the dawn of the Third Millennium". I renew this exhortation to you so that you will be wise and vigilant sentinels who keep alive the desire for Christ. Be missionaries to your contemporaries, without being discouraged in the face of difficulties, seek ways of evangelizing the world of youth.

I think of the good you have accomplished for years now at the "Don Orione Sports Centre", perfectly integrated into the life of the parish, as well as the apostolic opportunities offered by the Centres for Professional Formation. I also congratulate you, young people of the parish, for having started a wonderful initiative, an alternative New Year's Eve that involves many of your contemporaries. At the end of December you bring together, for an event of prayer and celebration, boys and girls from all over Italy. Your idea has even spread to other countries in other parts of the world.

With youthful enthusiasm, prepare yourselves for the next World Youth Day, to be held in Toronto in July of 2002, by reflecting on the Message taken from the Gospel: "You are the salt of the earth ... you are the light of the world" (Mt 5,13-14).

6. God the Father, who in Jesus Christ *"loved us and in his mercy gave us eternal consolation and hope, console your hearts and strengthen them for every good work and word"* (2 Thes 2,16-17).

Dear Brothers and Sisters, with these words of the Apostle Paul, that we just heard in the liturgy, I encourage you to persevere every day in your Christian life. For an apostolate that will be productive of great good, be faithful to prayer and stay anchored to the solid rock which is Christ.

May Blessed Luigi Orione help you on your spiritual journey. May Our Lady whom you honour with the wonderful title of *Mother of God* help you, as she watches over the City from this place.

To her, Mother of God and of the Church, I entrust you. May she protect and guide you every day. Amen.