



The Holy See

MASS WITH THE COMMUNITY
OF ST. JOHN NEPOMUCENE NEUMANN PARISH

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Sunday, 15 December 2002

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. *"Brethren, rejoice always* (I Thes 5,16). The invitation of the Apostle Paul to the faithful of Thessalonica, that has just been read, expresses well the atmosphere of today's liturgy. Indeed, today is the third Sunday of Advent, traditionally known as *"Gaudete"* (*Rejoice*) Sunday, from the Latin Word with which the Entrance Antiphon begins.

"Rejoice in the Lord always". In the face of the inevitable difficulties of life, the uncertainties and fears for the future, the temptation to give in to despair and disappointment, the Word of God always proclaims again the *"glad tidings"* of salvation: the Son of God comes to heal *"the wounds of the broken-hearted"* (cf. Is 61,1). May this joy, anticipation of the coming joy of Christmas, fill each of our hearts and every corner of our lives.

2. Dear brothers and sisters of the Parish of St John Nepomucene Neumann: Welcome! It is wonderful to meet you just before Christmas! As we know, Christmas is a feast that families and children especially enjoy, and you are a parish made up of many young families.

I offer all of you my cordial greeting. I greet Cardinal Ruini, Vicar of Rome, the Auxiliary Bishop of the Western sector, Bishop Apicella, your parish priest, Fr Danilo Bissacco, and his vicars, to whom the care of the community is entrusted. I thank those who, on your behalf, expressed sentiments of affection and communion to me at the beginning of the celebration. Through you who are here, I would like to convey a word of heartfelt closeness to the almost 10,000 people who live in the parish territory.

Gathered round the Eucharist, we realize more easily how it is the mission of every Christian community to bring the message of God's love to all people. This is the reason why it is important that the Eucharist always be the heart of the life of the faithful, as it is today for your parish, even if all its members have not been able to take part personally.

3. Two years after its foundation, your community still does not have a proper place of worship. On this very day, the Third Sunday of Advent, the diocese observes the Day of Prayer and Awareness so that all the areas of the city, especially those on the outskirts, may have a church with the necessary structures for the normal round of liturgical, formative and pastoral activities.

I hope that you too will be able to achieve this plan as soon as possible, but without losing the missionary style that in recent years has made your parish family lively and dynamic.

I am conscious of the difficulties your parish has to face every day. The ancient Borgata Fogaccia, today known as Borgata Montespaccato, in which the parish is located, is a densely populated area, where buildings have shot up without respect for the zoning plan, without social structures, and where there is a noticeable presence of non-Italian immigrants and people in search of permanent work.

4. However, you must not lose heart. Besides, your young community is full of initiative, thanks to the Redemptorist Fathers who, in the year of the Great Jubilee as true sons of St Alphonsus, agreed to take charge of the parish. Despite the lack of structures and the burdens of daily life, you already take care of those in difficulty.

Dear brothers and sisters, continue on this path. Above all, take care of the children and adolescents, ensuring that they do not lack attention, friendship or confidence. Support families, especially young and poor ones, and those in difficulty.

May your heavenly Patron, St John Nepomucene Neumann, protect you even though you may not know him as well as he deserves. In the mid-19th century, this great missionary bishop, an extraordinary pioneer of the Gospel in North America, spent himself for the Lord, for the Church and for the people entrusted to his care. Imitate his zeal for proclaiming the Gospel and his burning love for the Church and for his neighbour in need.

5. "*Make straight the way of the Lord*" (Jn 1,23). Let us accept the Evangelist's invitation! The approach of Christmas calls us to a more vigorous expectation as we await the Lord who comes, even as today's liturgy presents John the Baptist to us as an example to imitate.

Finally, let us turn our gaze to Mary, "cause" of our true and profound joy, so that she may obtain for each one that joy which comes from God and which no one can ever take from us. Amen!

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