



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER TO ALL THE PEOPLE OF ROME

Dear Brothers and Sisters of Rome!

1. We are now nearing the beginning of the Great Jubilee! After a period of intense preparation, we are getting ready to cross the threshold of this time of grace and pardon, in which we wish to celebrate with joy and gratitude the 2,000 years since the Incarnation of the Word.

This event, which involves the whole Church, places Rome at the centre of Christianity and in a special way makes it "a city set on a hill" (cf. *Mt* 5: 14), to which all nations look. This is the see of Peter and his Successors; here is the heart of the community of believers; here the centre for spreading the Gospel. Pilgrims will come here from every corner of the earth to visit the basilicas and churches linked to the memory of the Apostles and martyrs, as well as to the perennial testimony of a faith rich in holiness and civilization.

Belonging to Christ, as heirs of the Apostles Peter and Paul, the Christians of the city of Rome form a holy edifice, which gives a contemporary and engaging value to the glorious signs of the past. I therefore urge each of you to live this grace that the Lord bestows on our city with ready and open generosity.

The story of Zacchaeus, recounted by the Evangelist Luke (cf 19: 1-10), recalls the wonders that Christ's coming worked in the life of a man who freely opened the doors of his home to him, enabling him to be converted and to walk the path of justice and love for others.

The joy felt by Zacchaeus is the same as that felt by those who encounter Christ and follow his footsteps with renewed spiritual enthusiasm. This is the experience of the Jubilee: an exceptional passage of Jesus through our city.

2. You have been preparing for this extraordinary event for some time. In particular, the City Mission, which has just ended, opened the homes, various milieus and above all the hearts of so many residents to the message of Christ, the only Saviour of the world. It is now necessary to

consolidate the results obtained from the Mission, by preparing our hearts to celebrate the Holy Year with ardent faith and evangelical love.

For believers the Jubilee is a favourable time to abandon a routine way of living the faith to rediscover true friendship with the Lord. It is an appropriate time to give conversion the meaning of a clean break with sin, by experiencing the joy of pardon received and given. It is a most advantageous time for rediscovering communion and brotherhood in the parishes, movements and various communities, by removing the obstacles of indifference, uninvolvedness, rejection of others, and achieving an authentic reconciliation with everyone.

Now and always there is time for making the powerful message echo in every heart and place: "God loves you and sent Jesus Christ his Son to save you".

3. When speaking to his fellow citizens in the synagogue of Nazareth, Jesus linked the year of favour from the Lord, which his presence inaugurated, with preaching the good news to the poor, with the release of captives, with giving sight to the blind and liberty to the oppressed (cf. *Lk* 4: 18-20). In this way he indicated that to celebrate the Jubilee also means to open our hearts to our brothers and sisters, especially those who are the poorest and most suffering.

Faithful to the teaching of the divine Master and the Apostles, the Church of Rome has, down the centuries, written bright pages of welcome, especially during Jubilees, with concrete and lasting signs of love for neighbour. Once again, in the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, Rome is called to offer Gospel hospitality to the pilgrims who will come in great numbers from every part of the earth. To this end, throughout the Holy Year there will be solemn Jubilee celebrations in common and appropriate moments for encounter and prayer in the parishes. Those who will come from other local Churches will return comforted, if they have experienced how the one faith in Christ makes them full members of the same ecclesial communion.

It is therefore important that our brothers and sisters should find on their arrival not only a city that is ready to receive them and to show them memorable places of history and faith, but especially a community that incarnates the Gospel and gives concrete signs of the supreme command of Christ's love.

4. In this perspective, I turn to you, children of this Church whose beginnings were bathed in the blood of the Apostles, and say: "Christian Rome, do not hesitate to open the doors of your homes to pilgrims. Joyously offer fraternal hospitality, especially during the events of greatest significance and scope, like World Youth Day, scheduled for 15 to 20 August 2000. May every structure in the parishes, institutes, schools and every other hospitality centre be available to them. In this way you will become the city of hospitality like the friendly home of Martha, Mary and Lazarus in Bethany, where Jesus liked to rest with his disciples, finding physical and spiritual refreshment!".

This invitation is for Christian families, so that they will experience the same joy as those who welcomed Jesus in Galilee, Samaria and Judea; for the parishes and the numerous religious communities in the Diocese, so that they will offer full and cordial hospitality to poor pilgrims; for the institutions and the many volunteers, so that they will be prepared to meet the needs of pilgrims and to make the stay in Rome of the elderly, the sick and the disabled as comfortable as possible.

5. Brothers and sisters of Rome, this Letter is for each of you! As I thank you for your generosity, I wish with all my heart to entrust you to the heavenly Mother of God, so that the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 will be a profound spiritual experience for you and an incentive to grow in fraternal solidarity.

May Mary, who was the first to welcome the Word of the Father, and with loving faith offered him to the whole world, may she who, moved by the Spirit, opened her heart to the Word and gave her "yes" to the Father's will, help the inhabitants of Rome to open their doors to Christ, our Redeemer, with a docile spirit. With her Mother's heart may she speak to those who are indifferent or who have faith without works or enthusiasm, to those who are far and sometimes even opposed to the Gospel. Through her intercession, may this city of ours become a leader of authentic faith and a builder of the civilization of love.

The numerous Marian images that adorn the churches and streets of the city testify to the unceasing devotion of Romans to Mary. Together with you I say to her: "Virgin Mother of God, bless Rome and all who live here; protect the children and the young, the families and parishes, the sick and the suffering, the lonely and those without hope. Show everyone Jesus, the blessed fruit of your womb, so that he may transform every man and every woman of this city into a credible witness of hope and peace".

With these wishes, I gladly send each of you my Blessing, dear brothers and sisters, so that the Lord, through the intercession of Mary, "*Salus populi Romani*", of the Apostles Peter and Paul and of all the saints, will bring to completion the work he has begun in you.

From the Vatican, 1 November 1999, the Solemnity of All Saints.

JOHN PAUL II