



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II TO THE MAYOR AND THE CITY COUNCIL OF ROME

Saturday, 23 December 1978

Mr Mayor,

I am sorry not to be able to give an adequate answer to the problems which you pointed out. My short experience in Rome does not allow me to do so.

I thank you heartily for the address of greeting and good wishes which, at the approach of the Christmas Solemnity and the New Year, you, together with those in charge of the City Council, have come personally to present to me with an act of appreciated courtesy. And I am sincerely glad to reciprocate these noble wishes for prosperity, peace and progress, not only for you and your collaborators, but also and above all for the whole, dear population of this extraordinary City of Rome.

It is just of these citizens that your presence, Mr Mayor, reminds me today. For I feel acutely that I share the responsibility for them with you: not the civil responsibility, which rightly belongs to your City Administration, but the religious and Christian one, entrusted to me through the grace of God with my recent election as Bishop of Rome by the Cardinals. The latter, though scattered all over the world, are by Canon Law an eminent part of the clergy of this diocese.

When Peter of Galilee came to this City, about the middle of the first century, he found there an imperial Capital, in which, as the historian Tacitus did not hesitate to admit, "all atrocities and shames were to be found" (Ann. 15, 44). But this is no longer the city I find before my eyes today. By divine goodness and through the industry of many generations of illustrious men, Rome has become more and more civilised and hardworking, a meeting place and diffusion point of many Christian and human values.

With that, I do not hide from myself the real problems and the urgent necessities which still loom over the citizens, both at the plane of city planning and at the social and welfare plane. Above all it is to be hoped that, at the same time and even more than the affirmation of justice, the quality of the moral and spiritual life of the citizens will improve, so that an atmosphere of reciprocal relations of mutual comprehension, alien to any form of hatred and violence, may be established. It is the firm persuasion of Christianity that human values can triumph only when there is established a climate of love, of which respect for the rights of all (both of the individual citizens and of the various social categories), tolerance, concord, and justice itself, are a necessary expression.

The Church intends to contribute to this above all by means of the work of apostolate, education, and charity carried out by the parishes, the religious communities and the free institutions which have come into being owing to the generous initiative of Catholics in the service of their neighbour. And I am happy that this work, so highly meritorious, has been and is more and more appreciated, requested, and sustained by the population.

It is a comfort for me to know that the special characteristic of this City will always be maintained at its rightful value. It represents not only a common human society, or just the capital of beloved Italy, but also assumes the form of the visible centre of the Catholic Church and a point of reference for the whole of Christianity, both because it is host to the Episcopal See of Peter, and because its soil is soaked with the venerable blood of not a few martyrs of the early Christian generations.

I wish to add here that in my twenty years of ministry as a bishop I have always dedicated myself, with all commitment and solicitude, in order that the right of every family to have a house should be recognized and guaranteed. It is a question that has always been particularly close to my heart, and even the brevity of my experience as Bishop of Rome does not prevent me from feeling all the seriousness of this problem for a dignified human life.

These are all reasons that give meaning and substance to our meeting today. Therefore, I renew my most sincere wishes to you, Mr Mayor, and to the Members of the City Council, for advantageous and disinterested work, which will really take as its aim the welfare of man and of the whole man. Furthermore, my good wishes go also to those whom you represent, that is, to your families and, even more, to all Romans without exception. They have the first place in my heart as universal Pastor, and I invoke the most abundant and fruitful blessings for them from the Lord.

