



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II TO CARDINALS, PAPAL HOUSEHOLD AND ROMAN CURIA

Thursday, 21 December 2000

1. *Pater misit Filium suum Salvatorem mundi: gaudeamus!*

This Christmas of the Great Jubilee, in which we contemplate with greater emotion the face of Christ 2,000 years after his birth, our joy is particularly vibrant. Gaudeamus! It is on the wave of this deep, heartfelt joy that I offer you my cordial greetings, dear Cardinals and staff of the Roman Curia, who have gathered for this traditional family appointment.

I am grateful to you, Cardinal Dean, for having expressed the Roman Curia's sentiments of affection and devotion, together with your good wishes which I cordially reciprocate. They spring not only from the finesse of the human heart but from the faith we share with one another, which assures us of the special presence of Christ wherever "two or three are gathered in his name" (cf. *Mt* 18: 20).

Pater misit Filium suum Salvatorem mundi! This central truth of the Christian faith also offers us as it were, the criterion of a "spiritual" assessment of this year of hard work and, in particular, indicates the way that is opening before us. The Holy Door is about to be closed, but Christ whom it represents is "the same yesterday and today and for ever" (*Heb* 13: 8). He is the "Door"! (cf. *Jn* 10: 9). He is the "Way"! (cf. *Jn* 14: 6). If you are here, as a special community gathered round the Successor of Peter, you are here because you have been called by Christ to serve the Church which he obtained with his Blood (cf. *Acts* 20: 28).

2. It is in his name that we have lived this year of grace, during which so many energies have been mobilized within the Christian people, both at a universal level and in the particular Churches. We have seen an enormous number of pilgrims flock here, to the centre of Christianity, to the various basilicas and, especially, to the tomb of the Prince of the Apostles. Day after day, in the wonderful setting of St Peter's Square, they have offered ever new witnesses of faith and devotion, either participating in solemn public celebrations or moving in orderly recollection to the Holy Door. This year St Peter's Square has been more than ever a "micro-cosmos" in which there has been an alternation of the most varied human situations.

Through the pilgrims from the different continents the world, in some way, has come to Rome. From children to the elderly, from artists to sportspeople, from the disabled to families, from politicians to journalists, from Bishops to priests and consecrated people, so many people have met here, not only desiring to bring themselves to Christ, but also their work, their professional and cultural milieus, their daily life.

Once again, I was able to proclaim Christ, Saviour of the world and Redeemer of man, to each of these generally very large groups. The Jubilee of young people has remained particularly vivid in the common memory, and not only because of its remarkable size, but above all because of the commitment shown by the "Pope's young people" - as they were called. I asked them: "*what*, or rather, *who* have you come in search of?". And I interpreted their sentiments of approval from their applause, saying: "You have come in search of Jesus Christ!" ([*Address in St Peter's Square, 15 August 2000*](#)).

3. With the successful outcome of this movement - a true pilgrimage of the People of God - you too, dear collaborators of the Roman Curia, have contributed by working in collaboration with the Committee of the Great Jubilee and the organizations involved from time to time to ensure the success of the celebrations of your respective competences. I make the most of this opportunity to express my grateful appreciation to the dicasteries and administrations of the Holy See, as well as to the offices of the Governorate. They have generously devoted themselves, each in his own province, to appropriately arranging the various Jubilee Days.

How can the daily work of the Cardinal Archpriest of the Vatican Basilica be forgotten, or the dedication of the Secretariat of State, of the Prefecture of the Papal Household and of the Office for the Liturgical Celebrations of the Supreme Pontiff? Nor can I omit to mention in particular the constant availability shown by the institutions set up for the media, from *L'Osservatore Romano* to the Holy See's Press Room, Vatican Radio and the Vatican Television Centre. And how could I forget the hidden but very important ministry of the penitentiaries and confessors of the various basilicas? I then extend my grateful thanks to the Vicariate of Rome for its great help with various events of the Jubilee Year, especially with the Eucharistic Congress and World Youth Day. I am also thinking of the many volunteers, young people and adults from various nations. To list all those who expended their energies for the success of the Jubilee would take too long. It is all under God's gaze and, according to Jesus' words, it will be the Father himself who "sees in secret" (*Mt 6: 6*), who will reward all those who have worked in his name and for the coming of his kingdom.

4. However, it seems to me significant, on this occasion in which we are gathered together to express our communion, to remember in particular the Jubilee which the Roman Curia celebrated personally last 22 February. The Curia's Jubilee was an intensely experienced moment of faith, in harmony with Peter's words: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (*Mt 16: 16*). The faith of the entire Church is measured by these words. In a special way the "*ministerium petrinum*" is based on this confession of the Prince of the Apostles and, with it, the task reserved for the special community we form. What we are, in fact, we are in relation to the ministry Christ entrusted to Peter: "Feed my lambs.... Tend my sheep" (cf. *Jn 21: 15-17*).

This is a mystery of grace and mercy which can only be understood in the perspective of faith. Precisely on the occasion of your Jubilee, I said to you that "the Petrine ministry is not founded on human abilities and strengths, but on the prayer of Christ who implores the Father that Simon's faith "may not fail" (*Lk 22: 32*)". I experience this every day. The Jubilee Year has also been for me a time in which I have felt Christ's presence more keenly. The work has been - as was

foreseeable - heavier than usual, but with God's help everything has turned out for the best. Now, at the end of this special year, I would like to praise the Lord who has granted me to proclaim his name so widely, making the Apostle Paul's programme fully my own: "What we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake" (2 Cor 4: 5).

5. May this perspective of faith, dear confrères, constantly mark your special service. If Christ supports the one he chose as the Successor of Peter, he will certainly not fail to grant his grace also to you, who have the demanding task of helping him. But if the gift is great, the responsibility of responding to it adequately is also a major one. The Roman Curia must therefore be a place in which holiness is breathed. A place where rivalry and careerism must be completely foreign, where only love for Christ must prevail, expressed in the joy of communion and service, in imitation of the One who "came not to be served but to serve" (Mk 10: 45).

6. I wanted to emphasize this essential reference to Christ with my pilgrimage to the Holy Land, preceded by the commemoration of Abraham "Our Father in Faith" in the Paul VI Hall, and by my visit to several Old Testament sites of the history of salvation, especially on Sinai. How is it possible to forget the emotion of those days in March in which I was granted to relive the fundamental moments of the historical events in Jesus' life, from his birth in Bethlehem to his death on Golgotha? In the Upper Room I thought especially of you, my dear co-workers of the Roman Curia. I took you with me in my memory and in my prayers. It was a true "immersion" in Christ's mystery. At the same time, it was an opportunity for meeting not only the Christian, but also the Jewish and Muslim communities. In the esteem which I showed those communities and which they fully reciprocated, I was able to have a foretaste of the joy that they will all experience, as a reflection of the joy of God himself, when that land, so holy and unfortunately so tormented, at last finds peace. Today we want to tell those who are suffering in that drawn out conflict of our closeness, and we pray God to calm the violence of feelings and weapons and to orient souls to satisfactory solutions for a just and enduring peace.

7. The ecumenical prayer that has characterized the Jubilee Year from its first moments is surely a marvellous image of it. I recall, we all recall, with emotion the opening of the Holy Door at St Paul-Outside-the-Walls on 18 January. Not only my own hands pushed open that door, but also those of Metropolitan Athanasios, representing the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, and those of the Anglican Primate, Archbishop George Carey. We represented the whole of Christendom, saddened by the historical divisions which wound it, but at the same time listening to God's Spirit who urges it on towards full communion.

We must not lose heart before the persistent efforts of the ecumenical process. We must believe that the goal of the full unity of all Christians really is possible, with the strength of Christ who sustains us. On our part, besides prayer and theological dialogue, we must foster that spiritual attitude which, precisely on that evocative occasion, I indicated as the "sacrifice of unity". With those words, I wished to call to mind the capacity for "changing our viewpoint, broadening our horizons, knowing how to recognize the action of the Holy Spirit who is at work in our brethren, discovering new dimensions of holiness and opening ourselves to fresh aspects of Christian commitment" (*Homily during the solemn Ecumenical Celebration*, 18 January 2000).

8. With the same openmindedness, the Jubilee was placed on the threshold of the interreligious dialogue which, inaugurated by the Second Vatican Council with the Declaration *Nostra aetate*, has made some significant steps forward

in these 10 years. I remember in particular the prayer at Assisi in 1986 and in St Peter's Square last year. This is obviously a dialogue which in no way intends to diminish the rightful proclamation of Christ as the one Saviour of the world, as the Declaration *Dominus Iesus* recently reaffirmed. The dialogue does not dispute this essential truth for the Christian faith, but rests on the presupposition that, precisely in the light of the mystery of God revealed in Christ, we can gather the many particles of light scattered by the spirit in the various cultures and religions. It is therefore possible, in the dialogical cultivation of these particles, to grow together, even with the believers of other religions, in love of God and in service to humanity, on our way towards the fullness of truth, to which God's Spirit mysteriously leads us (cf. *Jn* 16: 13).

9. The Great Jubilee, inspired by its distant but ever-living Biblical origins, has also been a year of more intense awareness of the urgent need for charity, especially in the dimension of aid to the poorest countries. Only in the context of a commitment inspired by "global" solidarity can a remedy be found to the risks inherent in a world economy potentially lacking the norms to safeguard the weakest. In this regard, the Church's commitment to reducing the international debt of the poorer countries has been very significant. The deliberations of many parliaments in this regard is certainly encouraging, but much remains to be done. Here I would also like to thank the national leaders who have accepted my repeated appeal to make a "gesture of clemency towards all prisoners". I hope that the progress begun will be brought to completion. Then, over and above these specific problems, there is the entire area of charity which the Jubilee reflection has placed before our eyes, urging all Christians to adopt an attitude of generous sharing. Charity remains the great consignment for the journey ahead of us. Through this shines the full brightness of the truth of the God-Love, of that God who "so loved the world that he gave his only Son" (*Jn* 3: 16).

10. *Pater misit Filium suum Salvatorem mundi: gaudeamus!* This certainty has guided the 2,000 years of Christian history. We must start from it once again at the beginning of this millennium. *Start from Christ!* This is the password which must accompany the Church on her entry into the third millennium. In a few days the Holy Door will be closed, but the living Door which is Christ himself will stay wider open than ever. I am sure that in this resumption of the journey, dear collaborators of the Roman Curia, you will once again be available and ready. In the spiritual world there are no pauses! The secret of this inexhaustible impetus is Christ himself whom, in a few days time, the liturgy will make us contemplate as a Child in the manger. Through the intercession of Mary, Mother of Hope, we will ask him to envelop us in his light and to sustain us on our new journey.

In his name I embrace you all with affection and, as I extend my most cordial greetings to you, I willingly impart to you my apostolic Blessing. Happy Christmas!

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