



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II TO PILGRIM GROUPS AND MEMBERS OF VARIOUS ASSOCIATIONS

Saturday, 23 December 2000

Dear Brothers and Sisters!

1. I am glad to offer you all my cordial welcome at this meeting which has the spiritual atmosphere of Christmas, now close at hand. The great mystery of the Incarnation which we are preparing to celebrate with special solemnity at the culmination of the Great Jubilee is a favourable opportunity for renewing our faith in the Son of God, born 2,000 years ago in Bethlehem.

The Jubilee is approaching its end. It is important, in this final stretch of the Jubilee journey, that each believer be more intensely committed to purifying and strengthening his own faith in the face of the dangers and snares which can threaten it in our times. And among the dangers, are there not also *those aberrant forms of religious sentiment* which exploit the deepest needs and aspirations of the human soul, offering perspectives of deceptive and misleading gratification? Unfortunately, many families are affected by this sad problem because of the involvement of some of their members, especially children, who are often more vulnerable and exposed to these risks.

For some time the Church has been looking with concern at these problems which touch the heart of Christian life. The spreading of "sects" must be an incentive to believers to deepen their convictions of faith. The only effective response to this challenge is a stronger witness to Christian values and a sound renewal of pastoral commitment. Only a deep faith lived with consistency is an effective antidote to these dangerous deviations of sentiment and religious practice.

2. I now turn my thoughts to the personnel of the *Roman Agency for the Preparation of the Jubilee*, who are accompanied by their families. Dear friends, today's meeting gives me the pleasant opportunity to express my cordial appreciation and deep gratitude for your generous efforts during these months of busy work. I am particularly grateful to you for your cooperation with the Holy See. Indeed, it is also due to your commitment that it has been possible for the Jubilee to be intense and fruitful. With competence and responsibility, you have helped all the pilgrims and tourists who

came to the capital during this period to enjoy a more serene and comfortable stay.

I warmly hope that your service for the celebration of the Jubilee Year has helped and will continue to help you to assimilate the great spiritual and cultural values proper to the Jubilee.

3. I would then like to greet the pilgrims who come from various parishes. Among them is the large group from Grumo Nevano and especially the children, accompanied by their parents. I hope that you who are the smallest ones will follow the example of the boy Jesus who, the Gospel says, "was obedient" to his parents, and "increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favour" (cf. *Lk 2: 51-52*).

I remind everyone that holy Christmas calls us to measure our faith against the central message of Christianity; that is, it invites us to welcome with a humble and grateful heart Jesus, who in his birth comes to meet man in poverty and concealment.

I also greet the members of the *Automobile Club* gathered here on their Jubilee pilgrimage. Dear friends, may you always find deep motivations and strong ideals to share in your association's activities and sports. The Jubilee is a pressing call to conversion of heart and to solidarity with your brothers and sisters. For this to happen, you must grow in listening to Christ and in accepting his saving message.

4. Lastly, I extend a cordial greeting to the other groups and individual members of the faithful gathered here. Dear friends, as I express my deep gratitude to you for today's visit, I invite you all to turn your gaze to Mary, Mother of the Redeemer. May she help us give a worthy welcome to the Son of God, made flesh in her virginal womb to share our human existence.

Let us make our own her wise and contemplative attitude, described by Luke, the Evangelist of the birth and childhood of Jesus. "Mary", he observes, "for her part, kept all these things, pondering them in her heart" (cf. *Lk 2: 19*). So may it also be for each of you, to whom I cordially impart my Blessing, accompanied by my fervent wishes for a joyful and holy Christmas.

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