



The Holy See

TE DEUM AND FIRST VESPERS
OF THE SOLEMNITY OF MARY, MOTHER OF GOD

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Saturday, 31 December 2005

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

At the end of a year which has been particularly eventful for the Church and for the world, mindful of the Apostle's order, "walk... established in the faith... abounding in thanksgiving" (cf. Col 2: 6-7), we are gathered together this evening to raise a hymn of thanksgiving to God, Lord of time and of history.

I am thinking with a profound and spiritual sentiment of 12 months ago, when for the last time beloved Pope John Paul II made himself the voice of the People of God to give thanks to the Lord, like this evening, for the numerous benefits granted to the Church and to humanity. In the same evocative setting of the Vatican Basilica, it is now my turn to ideally gather from every corner of the earth the praise and thanksgiving raised to God at the end of 2005 and on the eve of 2006. Yes, it is our duty, as well as a need of our hearts, to praise and thank the eternal One who accompanies us through time, never abandoning us, and who always watches over humanity with the fidelity of his merciful love.

We may well say that the Church lives to praise and thank God. She herself has been an "action of grace" down the ages, a faithful witness of a love that does not die, of a love that embraces people of every race and culture, fruitfully disseminating principles of true life.

As the Second Vatican Council recalls, "the Church prays and likewise labours so that into the People of God, the Body of the Lord and the Temple of the Holy Spirit, may pass the fullness of the whole world, and that in Christ, the head of all things, all honour and glory may be rendered to

the Creator, the Father of the universe" (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 17).

Sustained by the Holy Spirit, she "presses forward amid the persecutions of the world and the consolations of God" (St Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, XVIII, 51, 2), drawing strength from the Lord's help. Thus, in patience and in love, she overcomes "her sorrows and her difficulties, both those that are from within and those that are from without", and reveals "in the world, faithfully, however darkly, the mystery of her Lord until, in the consummation, it shall be manifested in full light" (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 8). The Church lives from Christ and with Christ. He offers her his spousal love, guiding her through the centuries; and she, with the abundance of her gifts, accompanies men and women on their journey so that those who accept Christ may have life and have it abundantly.

This evening I make myself first of all the voice of the Church of Rome to raise to Heaven our common hymn of praise and thanksgiving. In the past 12 months, our Church of Rome has been visited by many other Churches and Ecclesial Communities, to deepen the dialogue of truth in charity that unites all the baptized, and together to experience more keenly the desire for full communion. Many believers of other religions, however, also wanted to testify to their cordial and brotherly esteem for this Church and her Bishop, aware that the serene and respectful encounter conceals the heart of a harmonious action in favour of all humanity.

And what can be said of the many people of good will who have turned their gaze to this See in order to build up a fruitful dialogue on the great values concerning the truth about man and life to be defended and promoted? The Church always desires to be welcoming, in truth and in charity.

As regards the journey of the Diocese of Rome, I wish to reflect briefly on the diocesan pastoral programme, which this year has focused attention on the family, choosing as a theme: "*Family and Christian community: formation of the person and transmission of the faith*".

My venerable Predecessors always made the family the centre of their attention, especially John Paul II, who dedicated numerous Interventions to it. He was convinced, and said so on many occasions, that the crisis of the family is a serious threat to our civilization itself.

Precisely to underline the importance of the family based on marriage in the life of the Church and of society, I also wished to make my contribution by speaking at the Diocesan Congress in St John Lateran last 6 June. I am delighted because the diocesan programme is going smoothly with a far-reaching apostolic action which is carried out in the parishes, at the prefectures and in the various ecclesial associations.

May the Lord grant that the common effort lead to an authentic renewal of Christian families. I take this opportunity to greet the representatives of the religious and civil Communities of Rome present at this end-of-year celebration. I greet in the first place the Cardinal Vicar, the Auxiliary

Bishops, priests, Religious and lay faithful from various parishes who have gathered here; I also greet the City Mayor and the other Authorities. I extend my thoughts to the entire Roman community whose Pastor the Lord called me to be, and I renew to everyone the expression of my spiritual closeness.

At the beginning of this celebration, enlightened by the Word of God, we sang the "Te Deum" with faith. There are so many reasons that render our thanksgiving intense, making it a unanimous prayer. While we consider the many events that have marked the succession of months in this year that is coming to its end, I would like to remember especially those who are in difficulty: the poorest and the most abandoned people, those who have lost hope in a well-grounded sense of their own existence, or who involuntarily become the victims of selfish interests without being asked for their support or their opinion.

Making their sufferings our own, let us entrust them all to God, who knows how to bring everything to a good end; to him let us entrust our aspiration that every person's dignity as a child of God be respected.

Let us ask the Lord of life to soothe with his grace the sufferings caused by evil, and to continue to fortify our earthy existence by giving us the Bread and Wine of salvation to sustain us on our way towards the Heavenly Homeland.

While we take our leave of the year that is drawing to a close and set out for the new one, the liturgy of this First Vespers ushers us into the Feast of Mary, Mother of God, *Theotokos*. Eight days after the birth of Jesus, we will be celebrating the one whom God chose in advance to be the Mother of the Saviour "when the fullness of time had come" (Gal 4: 4).

The mother is the one who gives life but also who helps and teaches how to live. Mary is a Mother, the Mother of Jesus, to whom she gave her blood and her body. And it is she who presents to us the eternal Word of the Father, who came to dwell among us. Let us ask Mary to intercede for us.

May her motherly protection accompany us today and for ever, so that Christ will one day welcome us into his glory, into the assembly of the Saints: *Aeterna fac cum sanctis tuis in gloria numerari.*

Amen!

