



# The Holy See

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PASTORAL VISIT TO THE PARISH  
OF SAINT JOHN OF THE CROSS IN ROME

**EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION**

***HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI***

*Third Sunday of Lent, 7 March 2010*

(Video)

*Images of the celebration*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

""Repent", says the Lord, "for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand"", we proclaimed before the Gospel of this Third Sunday of Lent that presents us with the fundamental theme of this "strong season" of the liturgical year: the invitation to change our lives and to do works worthy of penance. Jesus, as we heard, recalls two items of news: a brutal repression in the Temple by the Roman police (cf. Lk 13: 1) and the tragic death of 18 people, killed when the tower in Siloam collapsed (v. 4). People interpret these events as divine punishment for those victims' sins, and thinking they are upright, believe they are safe from such accidents and that they have nothing in their own lives that they should change. Jesus, however, denounces this attitude as an illusion: "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered thus? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish" (vv. 2-3). And he invites us to reflect on these events for a greater commitment on the journey of conversion, for it is precisely the closure of ourselves to the Lord and the failure to take the path of our own conversion that lead to death, to the death of the soul. In Lent, each one of us is asked by God to mark a turning point in our life, thinking and living in accordance with the Gospel, correcting some aspect of our way of praying, acting or working and of our relations with others. Jesus makes this appeal to us, not with a severity that is an end in itself but precisely because he is concerned for our good, our happiness

and our salvation. On our part, we must respond to him with a sincere inner effort, asking him to make us understand which particular ways we should change.

The conclusion of the Gospel passage reverts to the prospect of mercy, showing the urgent need to return to God, to renew life in accordance with God. Referring to a custom of the time, Jesus presents the parable of a fig tree planted in the vineyard. However, this fig tree was barren, it produced no fruit (cf. Lk 13: 6-9). The dialogue that develops between the master and the vinedresser shows on the one hand the mercy of God who is patient and allows human beings, all of us, time in which to convert; and on the other, the need to start to change both our interior and exterior way of life straight away in order not to miss the opportunities that God's mercy affords us to overcome our spiritual laziness and respond to God's love with our own filial love.

Moreover, in the passage we have heard, St Paul urges us not to deceive ourselves: it is not enough to have been baptized and nourished at the Eucharistic table if we do not live as Christians and are not attentive to the Lord's signs (cf. 1 Cor 10: 1-4).

Dear brothers and sisters of the Parish of San Giovanni della Croce, I am very glad to be with you today to celebrate the Lord's Day with you. I cordially greet the Cardinal Vicar, the Auxiliary Bishop of the Sector, Fr Enrico Gemma, your parish priest whom I thank for his beautiful words on behalf of you all, and the other priests who help him. I would then like to extend my thoughts to all the inhabitants of the district, especially the elderly, the sick and those who are lonely and in difficulty. I remember each and every one to the Lord at this Holy Mass.

I know that your parish is a young community. Indeed, it began its pastoral activity in 1989. It spent 12 years in temporary premises and then in the new parish complex. Now that you have a new sacred building, I would like my Visit to be an encouragement to you to become more and more the Church of living stones that you are. I know that the experience of the first 12 years marked a lifestyle that still endures. The lack of suitable premises and consolidated traditions, in fact, impelled you to trust in the power of God's word which has been a lamp to light you on your way and has brought practical results of conversion, participation in the Sacraments, especially in the Sunday Eucharist, and service. I now urge you to make this Church a place in which people learn to listen better and better to the Lord who speaks to us in the Sacred Scriptures. May these never cease to be the life-giving centre of your community so that it may become a continuous school of Christian life from which every pastoral activity stems.

The building of the new parish church has spurred you to a unanimous apostolic commitment, with special attention to the areas of catechesis and the Liturgy. I congratulate you on the pastoral efforts you are making. I know that various groups of the faithful gather to pray, to be trained at the school of the Gospel, to participate in the Sacraments especially Penance and the Eucharist and to live that dimension essential to Christian life which is charity. I am thinking gratefully of all who help make the liturgical celebrations livelier and increase the number of participants, as well as of

those who, together with the parish *Caritas* and the Sant'Egidio group, seek to meet the many needs in the territory, especially the expectations of the poorest and neediest. Lastly, I am thinking of all your praiseworthy efforts for families and for the Christian education of children and of those who attend the after-school prayer and recreation centre.

Since it came into being this parish has been open to the new Movements and Ecclesial Communities, thereby developing a broader awareness of Church and experiencing new forms of evangelization. I urge you to continue courageously in this direction, but make sure you combine all the realities present in a uniform pastoral project. I learned with pleasure that with regard to vocations and the role of consecrated and lay people, your community is proposing to promote the co-responsibility of all the members of the People of God. As I have already had the opportunity to recall, this requires a change in mindset, particularly concerning lay people: "They must no longer be viewed as 'collaborators', of the clergy but truly recognized as 'co-responsible', for the Church's being and action, thereby fostering the consolidation of a mature and committed laity" (*Address to the Ecclesial Convention of the Diocese of Rome*, 26 May 2009).

Dear Christian families, dear young people who live in this neighbourhood and attend the parish, let the wish to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all involve you more and more. Do not wait for others to come and bring you other messages that do not lead to life; rather, make yourselves missionaries of Christ for your brothers and sisters, where they live, work and study or merely spend their leisure time. Here too, start a far-reaching and thorough vocations ministry, consisting of the education of families and young people in prayer and in living life as a gift that comes from God.

Dear brothers and sisters, the strong season of Lent invites each one of us to recognize the mystery of God that becomes present in our life, just as we heard in the First Reading. Moses sees a bush in the wilderness that is burning but without being consumed. First of all impelled by curiosity, he approaches it to see the mysterious event when suddenly a voice comes from the bush that says: "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Ex 3: 6). And it is precisely this God who sent him to Egypt, charging him to lead the People of Israel to the Promised Land and to ask the Pharaoh, on his behalf, to set Israel free. At this point Moses asks God what his Name is, the Name with which God manifests his special authority, in order to present God to the people and then to the Pharaoh. God's answer may seem strange; it seems both an answer and not an answer. He says of himself simply: "I am who I am". "He is", and this must suffice. God, therefore, does not reject Moses' request. He pronounces his Name, thus creating the possibility of invoking him, of calling on him, of a relationship with him. By revealing his Name, God establishes a relationship between himself and us. He enables us to invoke him, he enters into relations with us and gives us the possibility of being in a relationship with him. This means that he gives himself, in a certain way, to our human world, becoming accessible, as if he were one of us. He faces the risk of the relationship, of being with us. What began in the burning bush in the desert is accomplished in the burning bush of the Cross where

God, having become accessible in his Son made man, really became one of us, is put into our hands and, in this way, realizes the liberation of humanity. On Golgotha God, who during the night of the flight from Egypt revealed himself as the One who frees us from slavery, revealed himself as the One who embraces every human being with the saving power of the Cross and the Resurrection and liberates him from sin and death, accepts him in the embrace of his love.

Let us remain in contemplation of this mystery of God's Name, the better to understand the mystery of Lent and to live as individuals and as communities in permanent conversion, so as to be a constant epiphany in the world, a witness of the living God who sets us free us and saves us out of love. Amen.

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