



The Holy See

CELEBRATION OF FIRST VESPERS OF THE FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT FOR UNBORN LIFE

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Vatican Basilica

Saturday, 27 November 2010

[\(Video\)](#)

[Photo Gallery](#)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

With this evening celebration the Lord gives us the grace and joy of opening the new Liturgical Year, starting with its first season: [Advent](#), the period that commemorates the coming of God among us. Every beginning brings a special grace, because it is blessed by the Lord.

In this Advent Season we shall be granted once again to experience the closeness of the One who created the world, who guides history and who cared for us to the point of deigning to become a man.

This great and fascinating mystery of the God-with-us, indeed, of the God who becomes one of us, is what we shall celebrate in the coming weeks journeying towards holy Christmas. During the [Season of Advent](#) we shall feel the Church which takes us by the hand and — in the image of Mary Most Holy, expresses her motherhood, enabling us to experience the joyful expectation of the coming of the Lord, who embraces us all in his love that saves and consoles.

While our hearts look forward to the annual celebration of Christ's Birth, the Church's Liturgy directs our gaze to the final goal: our encounter with the Lord who will come in the splendour of glory. For this reason in every Eucharist we "announce his death, proclaim his Resurrection until he comes again", we watch in prayer.

The Liturgy does not cease to encourage and support us, putting on our lips, in the days of Advent, the cry with which the whole of Sacred Scripture ends, on the last page of the Revelation to St John: "Come, Lord Jesus" (22:20).

Dear brothers and sisters, our gathering this evening for the beginning of the journey through Advent is enriched by another important reason: together with the whole Church we wish to celebrate a solemn prayer vigil for unborn life. I would like to express my gratitude to all those who have accepted this invitation and to those who are specifically dedicated to welcoming and safeguarding human life in its various situations of frailty, especially when it is newly conceived and in its early stages.

Precisely, the beginning of the Liturgical Year helps us live anew the expectation of God who took flesh in the womb of the Virgin Mary, God who makes himself little, who becomes a child; it speaks to us of the coming of a God who is close, who chose to experience human life from the very beginning in order to save it totally, in its fullness. And so the mystery of Lord's Incarnation and the beginning of human life are closely and harmoniously connected and in tune with each other in the one saving plan of God, the Lord of the life of each and everyone.

The Incarnation reveals to us, with intense light and in a surprising way, that every human life has a very lofty and incomparable dignity.

In comparison with all the other living beings that populate the earth man has an unmistakable originality. He is presented as the one unique being, endowed with intelligence and free will, as well as consisting of material reality. He lives simultaneously and inseparably in both the spiritual and the corporal dimension.

This is also suggested in the text of the First Letter to the Thessalonians that has just been proclaimed: "May the God of peace himself", St Paul writes, "sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (5:23).

We are therefore spirit, soul and body. We are part of this world, tied to the possibilities and limitations of our material condition, while at the same time we are open to an infinite horizon, able to converse with God and to welcome him within us. We are active in earthly realities and through them we are able to perceive God's presence and to reach out to him, Truth, Goodness and absolute Beauty. We savour fragments of life and happiness and yearn for complete fulfilment.

God loves us deeply, totally and without making distinctions. He calls us to friendship with him, he makes us part of a reality beyond every imagination and every thought and word: his divine life itself.

With feeling and gratitude, let us be aware of the value of every human person's incomparable dignity and of our great responsibility to all. "Christ, the final Adam", the [Second Vatican Council](#) states, "by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and his love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear... by his Incarnation, the Son of God has in a certain way united himself with each man" ([Gaudium et Spes](#), n. 22).

Believing in Jesus Christ also means seeing man in a new way, with trust and hope. Moreover, experience itself and right reason testify that the human being is capable of understanding and of wanting, conscious of himself and free, unrepeatable and irreplaceable, the summit of all earthly realities, and who demands to be recognized as a value in himself and deserves always to be accepted with respect and love. He is entitled not to be treated as an object to be possessed or a thing to be manipulated at will, and not to be exploited as a means for the benefit of others and their interests.

The human person is a good in himself and his integral development must always be sought. Love for all, moreover, if it is sincere, tends spontaneously to become preferential attention to the weakest and poorest. This explains the Church's concern for the unborn, the frailest, those most threatened by the selfishness of adults and the clouding of consciences.

The Church continually reasserts what the [Second Vatican Council](#) declared against abortion and against every violation of unborn life: "from the moment of its conception life must be guarded with the greatest care" ([ibid.](#), n. 51).

Cultural trends exist that seek to anaesthetize consciences with spurious arguments. With regard to the embryo in the mother's womb, science itself highlights its autonomy, its capacity for interaction with the mother, the coordination of biological processes, the continuity of development, the growing complexity of the organism.

It is not an accumulation of biological material but rather of a new living being, dynamic and marvelously ordered, a new individual of the human species. This is what Jesus was in Mary's womb; this is what we all were in our mother's womb. We may say with Tertullian, an ancient Christian writer: "the one who will be a man is one already" ([Apologeticum IX](#), 8), there is no reason not to consider him a person from conception.

Unfortunately, even after birth, the lives of children continue to be exposed to neglect, hunger, poverty, disease, abuse, violence and exploitation. The many violations of their rights sorrowfully wound the conscience of every person of good will.

In the face of the sad view of injustices committed against human life, before and after birth, I make my own Pope John Paul II's passionate appeal to the responsibility of each and every individual: "respect, protect, love and serve life, every human life! Only in this direction will you find

justice, development, true freedom, peace and happiness!” (Encyclical *Evangelium vitae*, n. 5).

I urge politicians, leaders of the economy and of social communications to do everything in their power to promote a culture ever respectful of human life, to obtain favourable conditions and support networks for the acceptance and development of life.

Let us entrust our prayers and our commitment to unborn life to the Virgin Mary, who welcomed the Son of God made man with her faith, with her maternal womb, with her attentive care, with her nurturing support, vibrant with love.

Let us do so in the Liturgy — which is the place where we live the truth and where truth lives with us — adoring the divine Eucharist in which we contemplate Christ’s Body, that Body which took flesh from Mary through the action of the Holy Spirit, and was born of her in Bethlehem for our salvation. *Ave, verum Corpus, natum de Maria Virgine!*

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