



The Holy See

TE DEUM AND FIRST VESPERS

OF THE SOLEMNITY OF MARY, MOTHER OF GOD

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI *St Peter's Basilica*

Saturday, 31 December 2011

[\[Video\]](#)

[Photo Gallery](#)

*Dear Cardinals,
Brother Bishops and Priests,
Distinguished Authorities,
Dear Brothers and Sisters!*

We have come together in the Vatican Basilica to celebrate First Vespers of the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, and to give thanks to the Lord at the end of the year by singing the *Te Deum* together. I thank all of you for choosing to join me for this occasion that is always so poignant and significant. In the first place I greet the Cardinals, my brother Bishops and Priests, men and women religious, consecrated persons and members of the lay faithful representing the entire ecclesial community of Rome. In a particular way I greet the Authorities present, beginning with the Mayor of Rome, and I thank him for the gift of a chalice, a gift that is renewed every year, in accordance with a fine tradition. I hope and pray that all will remain committed to making this City ever more in tune with the values of faith, culture and civilization that form an integral part of its vocation and its thousands of years of history.

Another year is drawing to a close, as we await the start of a new one: with some trepidation, with our perennial desires and expectations. Reflecting on our life experience, we are continually astonished by how ultimately short and ephemeral life is. So we often find ourselves asking: what meaning can we give to our days? What meaning, in particular, can we give to the days of toil and grief? This is a question that permeates history, indeed it runs through the heart of every generation and every individual. But there is an answer: it is written on the face of a Child who was

born in Bethlehem two thousand years ago, and is today the Living One, risen for ever from the dead. From within the fabric of humanity, rent asunder by so much injustice, wickedness and violence, there bursts forth in an unforeseen way the joyful and liberating novelty of Christ our Saviour, who leads us to contemplate the goodness and tenderness of God through the mystery of his Incarnation and Birth. The everlasting God has entered our history and he remains present in a unique way in the person of Jesus, his incarnate Son, our Saviour, who came down to earth to renew humanity radically and to free us from sin and death, to raise us to the dignity of God's children. Christmas not only recalls the historical fulfilment of this truth that concerns us directly, but in a mysterious and real way, gives it to us afresh.

How evocative it is, at this close of a year, to listen again to the joyful message addressed by Saint Paul to the Christians of Galatia: "when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons" (*Gal 4:4-5*). These words penetrate the heart of the history of us all and illumine it, or rather, they save it, because since the Day of the Lord's Nativity, the fullness of time has reached us. So there is no more room for anxiety in the face of time that passes, never to return; now there is room for unlimited trust in God, by whom we know we are loved, for whom we live and to whom our life is directed as we await his definitive return. Since the Saviour came down from heaven, man has ceased to be the slave of time that passes to no avail, marked by toil, sadness and pain. Man is son of a God who has entered time so as to redeem it from meaninglessness and negativity, a God who has redeemed all humanity, giving it everlasting love as a new perspective of life.

The Church lives and professes this truth and intends to proclaim it today with fresh spiritual vigour. In tonight's celebration we have special reasons to praise God for his mystery of salvation, active in the world through the ministry of the Church. We have so many reasons to thank the Lord for what our ecclesial community, at the heart of the universal Church, is accomplishing in the service of the Gospel in this City. In that regard, together with the Vicar General, Cardinal Agostino Vallini, the Auxiliary Bishops, parish priests and the whole diocesan presbyterate, I would like to thank the Lord especially for the promising communal project aimed at tailoring day-to-day pastoral work to the demands of our time, through the programme "Belonging to the Church and Pastoral Co-responsibility". The aim is give first priority to evangelization, so as to make the participation of the faithful in the sacraments more responsible and more fruitful, so that every person can speak of God to modern man and proclaim the Gospel incisively to those who have never known it or have forgotten it.

In the Diocese of Rome, as elsewhere, the most urgent pastoral challenge facing us is the *quaestio fidei*. Christ's disciples are called to reawaken in themselves and in others the longing for God and the joy of living him and bearing witness to him, on the basis of what is always a deeply personal question: why do I believe? We must give primacy to truth, seeing the combination of faith and reason as two wings with which the human spirit can rise to the contemplation of the

Truth (cf. *Fides et Ratio*, Prologue); we must ensure that the dialogue between Christianity and modern culture bears fruit; we must see to it that the beauty and contemporary relevance of the faith is rediscovered, not as an isolated event, affecting some particular moment in our lives, but as a constant orientation, affecting even the simplest choices, establishing a profound unity within the person, so that he becomes just, hard-working, generous and good. What is needed is to give new life to a faith that can serve as a basis for a new humanism, one that is able to generate culture and social commitment.

Within this framework, at the Diocesan Conference held last June, the Diocese of Rome launched a programme which sets out to explore more deeply the meaning of Christian initiation and the joy of bringing new Christians into the faith. To proclaim faith in the Word made flesh is, after all, at the heart of the Church's mission, and the entire ecclesial community needs to rediscover this indispensable task with renewed missionary zeal. Young generations have an especially keen sense of the present disorientation, magnified by the crisis in economic affairs which is also a crisis of values, and so they in particular need to recognize in Jesus Christ "the key, the centre and the purpose of the whole of human history" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 10).

Parents are the first educators in faith of their children, starting from a most tender age, and families must therefore be supported in their educational mission by appropriate initiatives. At the same time it is desirable that the baptismal journey, the first stage along the formative path of Christian initiation, in addition to fostering conscious and worthy preparation for the celebration of the Sacrament, should devote adequate attention to the years following Baptism, with appropriate programmes that take account of the life conditions that families must address. I therefore encourage parish communities and other ecclesial groupings to engage in continuing reflection on ways to promote a better understanding and reception of the sacraments, by which man comes to share in the very life of God. May the Church of Rome have no shortage of lay faithful who are ready to make their own contribution to building living communities that allow the Word of God to burst forth in the hearts of those who have not yet known the Lord or have moved away from him. At the same time, it is appropriate to create opportunities to encounter the City, giving rise to fruitful dialogue with those who are searching for Truth.

Dear friends, ever since God sent his only-begotten Son, so that we might obtain adoptive sonship (cf. *Gal* 4:5), we can have no greater task than to be totally at the service of God's plan. And so I would like to encourage and thank all the faithful from the Diocese of Rome who feel a responsibility to restore our society's soul. Thank you, Roman families, the first and fundamental cells of society! Thank you, members of the many Communities, Associations and Movements that are committed to animating the Christian life of our City.

Te Deum laudamus! We praise you, O God! The Church suggests that we should not end the year without expressing our thanks to the Lord for all his benefits. It is in God that our last hour must come to a close, the last hour of time and history. To overlook this goal of our lives would be to fall

into the void, to live without meaning. Hence the Church places on our lips the ancient hymn *Te Deum*. It is a hymn filled with the wisdom of many Christian generations, who feel the need to address on high their heart's desires, knowing that all of us are in the Lord's merciful hands.

Te Deum laudamus! This is also the song of the Church in Rome, for the wonders that God has worked and continues to work in her. With hearts full of thanksgiving, let us prepare to cross the threshold of 2012, remembering that the Lord is watching over us and guarding us. To him this evening we wish to entrust the whole world. Let us place in his hands the tragedies of this world and let us also offer him our hopes for a brighter future. And let us place these prayers in the hands of Mary, Mother of God, *Salus Populi Romani*. Amen.

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