



The Holy See

HOMAGE TO THE IMMACULATE AT THE SPANISH STEPS

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Monday, 8 December 2008

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

About three months ago I had the joy of going on [pilgrimage to Lourdes](#), on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the historical apparitions of the Virgin Mary to St Bernadette. The celebration of this unique anniversary ends precisely today on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, because in showing herself to Bernadette for the last time in the Grotto of Massabielle, the "beautiful Lady", as Bernadette called her, revealed her name, saying "I am the Immaculate Conception". She said this in the local dialect and the little visionary related the phrase, to her unknown and incomprehensible, to her parish priest.

"Immaculate Conception": we too repeat that mysterious name with feeling, here, at the foot of this monument in the heart of Rome; and countless brothers and sisters of ours are doing the same in thousands of other places in the world, at shrines and in chapels as well as in Christian homes. Today, wherever a Catholic community exists, Our Lady is venerated in it with this stupendous and marvellous name: the Immaculate Conception. Of course, the conviction that Mary's conception was immaculate had already existed for centuries before the apparitions in Lourdes, but which came as a heavenly seal after my venerable Predecessor, Bl. Pius IX, defined the Dogma on 8 December 1854. On today's feast, so dear to Christian people, this expression rises from hearts and is pronounced by lips as our heavenly Mother's name. Just as a child raises his eyes to his mother's face and on seeing her smile forgets every fear and every pain, so do we, turning our eyes to Mary, recognize in her "God's smile", the immaculate reflection of divine light; in her we find new hope even in the midst of the problems and tragedies of the world.

It is a tradition that the Pope joins with the homage of the City, bringing Mary a basket of roses.

These flowers express our love and devotion: the love and devotion of the Pope, of the Church of Rome and of the inhabitants of this City, who feel they are spiritual children of the Virgin Mary. Roses, symbolically, can express everything beautiful and good that we have done during the year because at this traditional encounter we all desire to offer everything to our Mother, convinced that we could not have done anything without her protection and without the graces that daily she obtains for us from God. Yet, as the saying goes, there is no rose without a thorn, and on the stems of these magnificent white roses too there is no lack of thorns that represent for us difficulty and suffering, the troubles that have marked and still mark people's lives and the life of our community. Joys are presented to our Mother but anxieties are also entrusted to her, since the faithful are confident that they will find comfort and support in her to go forward, so as not to be disheartened.

O Immaculate Virgin, at this moment I would especially like to entrust to you the "little ones" of our City: the children, first of all, and above all those who are seriously ill, children who are disabled and those who are suffering the consequences of oppressive family situations. Watch over them and grant that they may feel the warmth of God's love in the affection and help of those who are beside them! To you, O Mary, I entrust the lonely elderly, the sick, immigrants who find it hard to adjust, families that find it difficult to make ends meet and people who cannot find employment or who have lost a job indispensable for their survival. Teach us, Mary, to show solidarity with those in difficulty, to fill the ever increasing social gaps. Help us to foster a more lively sense of the common good, of respect for public property, and spur us to view the city and more than ever our City of Rome as the patrimony of all, making each one of us do our part, to build a more just and supportive society with awareness and commitment.

O Immaculate Mother, who are a sign of certain hope and comfort to everyone, help us to let ourselves be attracted by your immaculate purity. Your beauty *Tota Pulchra*, as we sing today assures us that the victory of love is possible; indeed, that it is certain. It assures us that grace is stronger than sin, and that redemption from any form of slavery is therefore possible. Yes, O Mary, help us to believe with greater trust in good, to wager on giving freely, on service, on non-violence, on the power of the truth. Encourage us to be alert, not to give into the temptation of easy evasions, to face reality and its problems with courage and responsibility. This is what you did, a young woman called to stake everything on the Word of the Lord. May you be a loving mother for our young people, so that they may have the courage to be "watchmen of the dawn", and give this virtue to all Christians so that they may be the heart of the world in this difficult period of history. Virgin Immaculate, Mother of God and our Mother, *Salus Populi Romani*, pray for us!