



The Holy See

VISIT TO "SAINT MARTHA'S" DISPENSARY IN VATICAN CITY

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Feast of the Holy Family of Nazareth

Friday, 30 December 2005

Dear Friends,

I greet with deep affection all of you who work in this Centre named after St Martha, the sister of Mary and Lazarus and an example of great availability to the divine Teacher. I thank you for your warm family welcome, as well as for the courteous words your representative addressed to me on behalf of you all.

I greet Sr Chiara and the other Sisters, the doctors, the volunteers and each one of the families who find invaluable help here.

The service you carry out is inspired by the example of St Martha who took care of Jesus, who as a man had human needs: he was thirsty and hungry, he was weary after his journey, he needed a moment of rest, to be away from the crowds for awhile and from the city of Jerusalem. Like Martha, you too strive to serve Jesus in the people you meet.

My Visit acquires special significance because it is taking place in the Christmas season: in these days our gaze comes to rest on the Infant Jesus. In coming here, I find Jesus himself in the children for whom you lovingly care. They are the subject of your attention, just as the newborn Messiah in the Crib is the focus of Mary and Joseph's care.

In each one of them, as in the Bethlehem Grotto, Jesus knocks at the door of our hearts, asking us to make room in our lives for him. God is like that: he does not impose himself, he never uses force to enter, but asks, as a child does, to be welcomed. In a certain sense, God too presents himself in need of attention: he waits for us to open our hearts to him, to take care of him. And

every time we turn lovingly to "one of these least brothers of mine", as the Lord said, it is he whom we are serving (cf. Mt 25: 40).

Today, we are celebrating the Feast of the Holy Family of Nazareth. Finding myself among you and noting your dedication to children and their parents, I would like to stress the fundamental vocation of the family to be the first and principal place where life is welcomed. The modern concept of family, partly in reaction to the past, gives great importance to conjugal love, emphasizing its subjective aspects of freedom of choice and feelings.

On the other hand, people are finding it harder to perceive and understand the value of the call to collaborate with God in procreating human life. Besides, contemporary societies, despite being equipped with so many means, do not always succeed in facilitating the mission of parents, either on the level of spiritual and moral motivations or on that of practical living conditions.

There is a great need, both from the cultural and the political and legislative viewpoints, to support the family, and initiatives such as your dispensary are more useful than ever in this regard. These realities are small but important, and, thanks be to God, the Church is rich in them and does not cease to put them at the service of all.

Dear brothers and sisters, before leaving you, I invite you to pray with me for all the families of Rome and the world, and especially for those in difficult conditions, particularly because they are obliged to live far from their country of origin.

Let us pray for the parents who do not succeed in guaranteeing their children what they need for their health, education and a dignified and serene life. Let us invoke the motherly protection of Mary for everyone: *Ave Maria....*

I now impart my heartfelt Apostolic Blessing to you and to your dear ones, as I wish you all a peaceful, prosperous New Year.

© Copyright 2005 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana