



The Holy See

VISIT TO THE SOUP KITCHEN
RUN BY THE ROME *CARITAS* ON THE COLLE OPPIO

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE BENEDICT XVI

Thursday, 4 January 2007

Dear Friends,

I have come very gladly to visit you in the atmosphere of the Christmas festivities and at the beginning of a new year which I hope will be peaceful for everyone. The Christmas context makes our meeting even more friendly, as it is taking place in an important setting in the city of Rome, a place rich in humanity.

I greet you all with affection, starting with Cardinal Camillo Ruini and Auxiliary Bishop Ernesto Mandara of the Central Sector. I greet Mons. Guerino Di Tora, Director of the Rome *Caritas*, whom I thank for his cordial words to me, and Mons. Angelo Bergamaschi, Vice-Director, as well as the workers and volunteers. I greet the head, the educators and the young people of the Youth Centre, "The Centre"; I am grateful to them for the beautiful songs with which they have regaled us.

You even sang the *Te Deum* in German. Thank you for your special attention.

I greet the parish priest of Sts Sylvester and Martin ai Monti, in the Monti district, and the priests and consecrated persons present. I address special thanks to the Head of the Soup Kitchen, and to the volunteer and guest who as spokesmen interpreted your common sentiments.

I offer my warmest greeting to you who benefit daily from this *Caritas* Soup Kitchen, and I would like to reach out with my thoughts to all your friends who come from almost all the countries of the

world and live in this city.

At this Soup Kitchen - which in a certain way could be considered the symbol of the Rome *Caritas*, - in this inn, as your spokesman said, it is possible to feel Christ's presence tangibly in the brethren who are hungry and in those who offer them food. Here, one can experience that when we love our neighbour, we become better acquainted with God: in the Bethlehem Grotto, in fact, he made himself manifest to us in the poverty of a newborn baby, in need of everything.

The Christmas message is simple: God came among us because he loves us and expects our love. God is love: not a sentimental love, but a love that became a total gift to the point of the sacrifice on the Cross, starting from his birth in the grotto in Bethlehem.

The beautiful crib that you have chosen to set up in your Soup Kitchen and which I have just had the opportunity to admire, speaks to us of this real and divine love. In its simplicity, the crib tells us that love and poverty go together, as is also taught by one who was deeply in love with Christ, St Francis of Assisi.

At Christmas, God made himself man because he is concerned about man, every man. And St Gregory of Nazianzus said he became man because he personally wished to experience what it means to be a man, what it really means to live in poverty. The great God wanted to experience human life himself, with all its suffering and with all the needs of the human being. The newborn Jesus was laid in the manger at Bethlehem, a name which, as you know, means "house of bread".

Actually, Jesus, "the Bread which comes down from Heaven", "the Bread of life" (cf. *Jn* 6: 32-51), becomes visible every day in a certain way in this Soup Kitchen, where there is a desire not only to eat food - eating is certainly important - but also to serve the person without distinction of race, religion or culture.

"Suffering man belongs to us", said my unforgettable Predecessor, John Paul II, after whom we have named the Soup Kitchen this very day. From the Grotto of Bethlehem, from every crib, a proclamation emanates that is addressed to everyone: Jesus loves us and teaches us to love, he challenges us to love. May those in charge, the volunteers and all who come to the Soup Kitchen experience the beauty of this love; may they feel the depth of the joy that springs from it, a joy that is certainly different from that deceptive illusory one publicized by advertisements.

We will soon be concluding our meeting by raising our prayers to the Lord. He is very familiar with the material and spiritual needs of everyone present here. I would like to pray to him, in particular, to continue to protect all the people in the Rome *Caritas* who carry out a precious act of solidarity here and in other points of the city. May the Holy Spirit enliven the hearts of those in charge and of all the workers and volunteers so that they may carry out their service with an ever more aware dedication, inspired by the authentic style of Christian love which the saints of charity have

summed up in the motto: *good should be done well.*

May the Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church, Mother of each one of us, watch lovingly over everyone.

I warmly bless you all.

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