



## The Holy See

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### VISIT TO THE ROMAN PARISH OF

### SAINT GREGORY THE GREAT IN MAGLIANA *HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II 18*

*February 1979* 1. In the Gospel of today we read that at Capernaum, in the house in which Jesus stayed, "*many were gathered together*" (Mk 2:2). There was not room for them all in the house, so great was the number of those who wished to listen to "the word that he was preaching", and to see what he did. And lo, in the midst of this crowd, Jesus does a very significant thing when a paralytic is put in front of him, lowered through an opening in the roof for lack of other space. Jesus first of all says to this man, "My son, your sins are forgiven" (Mk 2:5). At these words a murmur arises among those who, with mistrust, have followed Christ's action. These are scribes who (rightly) affirm, "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (Mk 2:7). But it had only been aversion to Jesus that had dictated this objection to them: "Why does this man speak thus? It is blasphemy!" (Mk 2:7). Jesus, in a certain sense, reads their thoughts and gives an answer: "Which, is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven', or to say, 'Rise, take up your pallet and walk'?" (Mk 2:9). "That you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins" — he said to the paralytic — "I say to you, rise, take up your pallet and go home" (Mk 2:10-11). Everything happens as Jesus has ordered. Jesus cures an incurable man. He works a miracle. By so doing he gives the proof that he has the power on earth to forgive sins. And as the scribes have affirmed that only God has this power, they should now draw the conclusion of what they themselves had sustained in words. Jesus reaffirms the presence of God among the crowd. Jesus reaffirms the divine power, proper to him, of forgiving sins. Jesus proves, at the same time, that the evil of sin is more dangerous and worrying than physical illness (in this case, serious and chronic disease). He is the Saviour who has come in the first place to remove this serious evil. What does this passage of the Gospel say to us gathered here? "Many were gathered together" then. And today, too, many are gathered. And I am thinking not only of the persons present in this church now, but of all the inhabitants of the Magliana area. For some time now, people who came to Rome from various parts have been gathering here. A large district has sprung up; at the same time, a new parish has come into being which now contains forty-five thousand persons. It is a very large parish. What does "parish" mean? Parish means: Christ's presence among men. Parish means a set of persons, it means a community in which and with which Jesus Christ reconfirms the presence of God. The parish is a living part of the People of God. While I say these things, your thought goes instinctively to your experience here, day after day, in the concrete context of your parish. Many of you, beginning with the parish priest, Don

Pietro Cecchelani, knew this parish, so to speak, in its infancy, when the community met in a small chapel which could hold at most two hundred persons. It is not necessary to go back very far in the years: the parish was constituted, in fact, on 13 December 1963. How much distance has been covered since then! The district has grown at a bewildering pace, rising from the four thousand five hundred inhabitants of the beginnings to the present forty-five thousand and more. But, at the same time, the Christian community has also grown, and not just in numbers: around the word of God, proclaimed by the priests, re-echoed by the catechists, borne witness to by the faithful in everyday life, there has been formed a community of persons who know one another, help one another, and love one another. An open, lively community, aware of the immense riches constituted by the Gospel of Christ, and therefore straining to proclaim it to the mass of the indifferent, the "distant". Evangelization — rightly felt as a primary commitment — occupies the priests, the Sisters of the two communities present in the parish, the youthful groups of the catechists; and it is developed not only in the ordinary forms, but also by means of new approaches, such as by reading and meditating on the Gospel in homes, in the so-called "block groups", in which several families gather together for a moment of reflection and communion. From this contact with the Gospel there springs a concrete commitment of charity towards brothers, both in the many initiatives in favour of the old, the sick, the disinherited, to whom large numbers of young people dedicate themselves, and also in solidarity with the problems of the district. This district, having "exploded" rather chaotically in the last few years, bears the sign of not a few inadequacies as regards primary social services, and suffers from the discomforts characteristic of recently formed suburban agglomerations. A great deal, obviously, has still to be done for the ecclesial community to reach full Christian maturity. What has already been done, however, and the intense pulsation of liturgical life within the walls of your new church, consecrated just over a year ago, hold out good hopes for the future of your parish. Recognizing the work you have carried out in the last few years, the Pope wishes to encourage you to persevere with renewed impetus in your Christian testimony within the district. You must feel the responsibility and pride of being leaven in it (cf. Mt 13:33) in order to stimulate opening to Christ and, at the same time, human elevation, thus contributing to the establishment in it of a more just and brotherly society.<sup>3</sup> Jesus Christ is present in the midst of you all *to confirm daily in this way the salvific presence of God*. Here there are certainly immense material, economic, and social needs; but, above all, there exists the need of this salvific power which is in God and which Christ alone possesses. It is this power that frees man from sin and directs him towards good, in order that he may lead a life really worthy of man: that married couples, parents, may give their children not only life, but also an upbringing, a good example; that real Christian life may flourish here, so that hatred, destruction, dishonesty and scandal may not prevail; that the work of fathers and also of mothers may be respected, and that this work may create the indispensable conditions to maintain the family; that the fundamental requirements of social justice may be respected; that real culture may be developed, beginning with the culture of everyday life. To bring all this about, so very much human work, so very much initiative, resourcefulness, and good will are necessary. But beyond everything the presence of Christ is necessary. He can say to each of these forty-five thousand persons, "Your sins are forgiven". That is, he can liberate everyone from interior evil and

*direct the mind and the heart towards good from within.* In fact, man, human life, and everything that is human is formed first from within. And according to what is "in man", in his conscience, in his heart, his whole exterior life and his relations with other men are modelled. If within man there is good — a sense of justice, love, chastity, benevolence to others, a wholesome desire for dignity — then good radiates outside, and is stamped on families, environments and institutions. The parish of St Gregory the Great at Magliana exists so that this good may be found in, every man who lives in this vast district, and so that it may irradiate your family, professional, and social life, your work benches, educational institutions, playgrounds and places of entertainment. St Paul tells us today in the passage of the Letter to the Corinthians that "we utter the Amen through him [Christ], to the glory of God" (2 Cor 1:20). It is a question just of this: to say "amen" to God; this means to say "yes", and never to say "no" to God. This is the task of the parish. My wish for you all, headed by your pastors, is that the whole parish, more and more consistently and more and more unanimously, will always say "yes" to Christ and, together with the Christ Redeemer, say "yes" to God, so that "no", the negation of God and of what corresponds to his holy will in our human life, may be uttered less and less here, in words and in deeds.<sup>4</sup> Your parish has grown considerably as regards the number of inhabitants. Some buildings are so large that each of them could be considered a "parish" in itself within the vast parish. Think it over, to try to find practical and effective lessons. We heard in the Gospel of today that the Lord taught in a house. It seems to me that this is an encouragement to continue in the attempts you have already started and which I mentioned above. For all of you and for your pastors in particular, let Pope St Gregory, who was a great master in the pastoral art, be an example and guide. He recalled that the pastor of souls "must be near everyone with the language of compassion and understanding", but he pointed out, at the same time, that to do this, he "must be able, to an extraordinary extent, to rise above all others through prayer and contemplation" (cf. *Regola Past.* II, 5). In the intimacy of conversation with God and in the regenerating contact with his grace, he can find the light and wisdom necessary to "adapt his word to the audience listening to him, so that it may be grasped by the mind of everyone, without losing the power of being edifying for all" (Ibid. II, prol.). May this happen in your parish! Then will be realized among you that which St Gregory, in a poetic image, indicated as the ideal of every Christian community: that is, to be like a "well-tuned lyre" which, skilfully touched by the artist, raises to God the harmonious sound of its melody (cf. *ibid.*). Before concluding, I would like to tell you my joy in knowing that in your parish there is a chapel dedicated to the Blessed Maximilian Kolbe, the great apostle of our century. Together with him and with Pope St Gregory, I entrust you all to the Blessed Lady who is the Mother of the Church, and who is invoked confidently by the inhabitants of this City of ours as *Salus Populi Romani*. In the liturgy of today the Prophet Isaiah says: "Behold, I am doing a new thing... do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert... The people whom I formed for myself [will] declare my praise" (Is 43:19-21). May all this take place among you. This is what the Bishop of Rome, Pope John Paul II, on the occasion of today's visit, wishes for the parish of St Gregory, at Magliana.

