



The Holy See

VISIT TO THE ROMAN PARISH OF

SAINT JOSEPH IN "FORTE BOCCIA"*HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II* 18 March

1979

1. "My Father's house", Today Christ utters these words on the threshold of the temple of Jerusalem. He appears on this threshold to "claim" his Father's house before men, to demand his rights over this house. Men have made it a market place. Christ reproves them severely; he opposes this deviation resolutely. Zeal for God's house consumes him (cf. Jn 2:17), therefore he does not hesitate to expose himself to the malice of the elders of the Jewish people and of all those responsible for what has been done against his Father's house, against the Temple. This event is a memorable one. The scene is a memorable one. With the words of his holy anger Christ inscribed deeply in the tradition of the Church the law of the holiness of God's house. Uttering those mysterious words concerning the temple of his body: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (Jn 2:19), Jesus consecrated all the temples of the People of God at once. These words take on special significance in the period of Lent when, meditating on the passion of Christ and on his death — the destruction of the temple of his body — we prepare for the solemnity of Easter; that is, for the moment when Jesus will reveal himself again to us in the very temple of his body, raised again by the power of God who wishes to construct in it, from generation to generation, the spiritual edifice of the new faith, hope, and charity.

2. Today I come to St Joseph's Parish and I wish to express to all of you present here, together with my cordial greeting, my deep joy because this district, too, has its temple, its house of God. It did not have it at once, at the moment of the canonical erection of the Parish which took place on 19 June 1961. Some years were to pass before arriving, exactly on 18 May 1970, at the consecration and inauguration of the new temple, this church of yours, which now rises, with its airy nave, towards the sky, singing the glory of God. I want to say a cordial word of praise to the parish priest and the Giuseppini priests to whom the parish is entrusted. This year they conclude the celebrations for the first centenary of the foundation of their well-deserving Congregation, which sprang from the apostolic heart of Venerable Giuseppe Marelli, Bishop of Acqui. This new church is an eloquent testimony of the zeal and generosity of his spiritual sons. I can easily imagine the toil, the sacrifices, the renunciations involved for them in completing this sacred edifice — so welcoming, functional, and religious — as well as the parish premises beside it. Let my praise and my thanks go to them. I then extend, as is right, the expression of my sincere appreciation to all the faithful, without whose constant and generous contribution it would, certainly not have been possible to carry on such a complex and costly enterprise, year after year, up to its successful completion. I am happy, too, to

take this opportunity to express to the Cardinal Vicar, present here with us, the great consideration in which I hold his commitment in the work of the construction of new churches; that is, in encouraging the building of an adequate house of the Lord in the new districts which are gradually being formed. The material edifice in which the faithful people gathers to listen to the word of God and take part in the celebration of the divine mysteries is a factor of prime importance for the growth and consolidation of that community of faith, hope and love, which the Parish is. In this connection, a word of recognition and gratitude must also be reserved for the Auxiliary Bishop, Monsignor Remigio Ragonesi, to whom the West sector of the diocese, to which also your Parish belongs, is entrusted. He is carrying out, with admirable dedication and zeal, the pastoral visit of this zone; and the purpose of his coming among you is to take note of the work accomplished, to coordinate initiatives in the apostolate, to consolidate understanding within the parish family, and to awaken the sense of responsibility in all the faithful. So accept his teaching and directives in an open, docile spirit. I learned with pleasure that there are present in the territory of the Parish as many as fourteen religious Institutes, including also a Carmelite Monastery of strict observance. The greeting of the Pope, who counts a great deal of their contribution to the life of the Community, goes to all these souls who follow the Lord in the practice of the evangelical counsels. Whatever their immediate specific purpose may be — the education of youth, care for the sick, assistance for the old, a life of contemplation and penance — they must always be deeply aware of the close relationship between their institutional commitment and the life of the Parish. For the latter is the concrete place in which the universal Church is built up in a more complete and visible way, which can be experienced by the inhabitants of every district. There cannot be lacking, at this point, a word of greeting and exhortation addressed expressly to lay people; to those, above all, who with generous availability, take their place at the side of their Pastors in order to assume the responsibility for evangelization with them. Glancing through the report which has been presented to me, I saw that an intense catechetical programme is going on in the Parish, with meetings well distributed during the week, attended by a good number of children and adults. I address my praise to all, to which I add encouragement to continue with constancy, thanks also to the recruiting of new forces among the young. I have not failed to note the presence of many other Groups, which set out to animate in a Christian way important areas of community life, such as the missionary, family, charitable, recreational and sports sectors, and so on. To all a cordial "well done!" and a pressing call to persevere with generous impetus, in spite of the inevitable difficulties. You are working for the kingdom of Christ, which is the kingdom of love, solidarity, and peace, and which, therefore, is the kingdom to which the heart of every human being aspires. May this awareness strengthen you and stimulate you in active participation in the various pastoral initiatives promoted by the Parish.³ The centre of all this apostolic effort, of this evangelizing work, is the house of God, the Father's house. Around this house there have multiplied the houses in which men live, in which individual families live. A house is of enormous importance for family life. Immense. Fundamental. So many circumstances condition the correct development of the life of a family, but among them the family house certainly has first place. You know that the diocese of Rome has undertaken to reflect in these days of Lent on this subject: "A house for every family", with the intention of driving it home to the consciences of the faithful, and of encouraging, in

individuals and in the community, the taking of opportune decisions, calculated to contribute to the just solution of such a serious problem. It is an action that must meet with a responsible and generous response on the part of all. It is rightly, moreover, the object of solicitude on the part of the authorities. Houses are built for man, to satisfy his fundamental needs. This fundamental purpose of theirs cannot be changed for other aims or motives. In a society that is honestly united in solidarity, houses for families, on which the future of this same society depends, cannot be lacking. Nor can there be lacking the house for God, for the Father of men and of families. May it never happen that our civilization should yield to the temptation: "we need houses, we do not need churches".⁴ The house is man's dwelling place. It is a necessary condition in order that man may come into the world, grow, develop; in order that he may work, educate, and educate himself; in order that men may form that deeper and more fundamental union, which is called the "family". Houses are built for families. Subsequently, the families themselves are constructed on truth and on love. The first foundation of this construction is union in marriage, which is expressed in the words of the Sacrament with which the bride and bridegroom promise one another union, love, and conjugal faithfulness. On this foundation rests that spiritual edifice, the construction of which can never cease. The married couple, as parents, must constantly apply to their own life, as wise builders, the measure of the union, the love, the integrity, and the faithfulness of marriage. They must renew this oath daily in their hearts and sometimes recall it also in words. Today, on the occasion of this pastoral visit, I call on them to do so particularly, because the pastoral visit must serve for the renewal of that temple, which we all form in the crucified and risen Christ. St Paul says that Christ is "the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:24). Let him be your power and your wisdom, dear spouses and parents. Let him be it for all the families of this parish. Do not deprive yourselves of this power and this wisdom! Strengthen yourselves in them. Bring up your children in them and do not allow this power and this wisdom, which is Christ, to be taken away from them one day: by any environment and by any institution. Do not allow anyone to destroy that "temple" which you construct in your children. This is your duty, but it is also your sacred right. And it is a right that no one can violate without committing an abuse.⁵ The family is constructed on the wisdom and the power of Christ himself, because it rests on a Sacrament. And it is also constructed, and is being constantly constructed, on divine law which cannot be replaced in any way by any other law. Can a human legislator abolish the commandments which the reading from the book of Exodus recalls to us today: "You shall not kill. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour" (Ex 20:13-16)? We all know the Ten Commandments by heart. They constitute the necessary links on which personal, family, and social life is based. If these links are lacking, man's life becomes inhuman. Therefore the fundamental duty of the family, and then of the school and of all institutions, is the education and the consolidation of human life on the foundation of this Law which no one may violate. In this way we are constructing with Christ the temple of human life, in which God lives. We construct in ourselves the Father's house. May zeal for the construction of this house be an element in the lives of all of us present here; of the whole parish whose Patron Saint is St Joseph, the Bridegroom of Mary the Mother of God, the Patron Saint of families. Protector of the Son of God, Patron Saint of the Holy Church. Tomorrow, 19 March, we will celebrate his liturgical

solemnity. May your Parish continue under his protection and develop as a family of God.

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