



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT TO THE ROMA PARISH OF THE YOUNG JESUS

EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Fifth Sunday of Lent, 29 March 1998

1. *"I do not wish the sinner to die, says the Lord, but to turn to me and live"* (Gospel acclamation; cf. *Ez 33:11*).

The words of the Gospel acclamation proclaimed a few moments ago introduce the comforting message of God's mercy, which was then illustrated by today's passage from the Evangelist John. Several scribes and Pharisees, "that they might have some charge to bring against him" (*Jn 8:6*), bring to Jesus a woman caught in the act of adultery. They intend to show that his teaching on God's merciful love contradicts the Law, which punished the sin of adultery with stoning.

Jesus however unmasked their cunning: "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her" (*Jn 8:7*). While this authoritative reply reminds us that it is only the Lord who can judge, it reveals the true meaning of divine mercy, which leaves open the possibility for repentance and emphasizes the great respect for the dignity of the person, which not even sin can take away. "Go, and do not sin again" (*Jn 8:11*). The last words of this episode show that God does not want the sinner to die, but to repent of the evil he has committed and live.

2. *"I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus"* (*Phil 3:8*). The Apostle Paul had a personal experience of saving righteousness. His meeting with Jesus on the road to Damascus opened the way to a deep understanding of the paschal mystery. Paul clearly understood how deceptive it is to want to create for oneself a righteousness based only on observance of the Law. Christ alone justifies man, every man, through the sacrifice of the Cross.

Moved by grace, Paul went from being a ruthless persecutor of Christians to being a tireless preacher of the Gospel, because "Christ Jesus has made me his own" (cf. *ibid*). We too, especially during this Lenten season, are invited to let the Lord make us his own: by the attraction of his word of salvation, by the power of his grace, by the proclamation of his

redemptive love.

3. Dear brothers and sisters of the Parish of the Young Jesus, I am pleased to celebrate with you this Fifth Sunday of Lent, which marks another stage in the liturgical journey to Easter, which is now at hand. I cordially greet the Cardinal Vicar, the Vicegerent, your zealous parish priest, Fr Enzo Policari, with his co-workers, the Salesian community which lives and works in the parish, and the Ukrainian seminarians who are guests here while their college is being remodeled.

I would like to address a special greeting to the entire Salesian family, which celebrated the 50th anniversary of its presence and activity in this Roman neighbourhood last Sunday. This presence is particularly appreciated because it is connected with the Borgo Ragazzi Don Bosco Institute, a praiseworthy institution founded in the immediate post-war period to offer hospitality to young people without families or homes, who were forced to shift for themselves.

In commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Borgo Ragazzi Don Bosco, so dear to my revered Predecessor, the Servant of God Pope Paul VI, I would like to thank the many Salesians who, following the charism of St John Bosco, have come one after another here, generously dedicating themselves to the younger generations of this extensive area on the outskirts of Rome. Thank you, dear friends, for the good you have tirelessly done and continue to do through your activities for young people. I am thinking in particular of the inter-parish activities programme, the popular school to aid boys and girls with only a secondary education, sacramental preparation in the numerous youth groups, and the many other formative and recreational activities.

4. Young people are humanity's future. To show concern for their human and Christian maturation is a valuable investment for the good of the Church and of society. I am delighted with what you are already doing and I hope that, in conformity with the diocesan pastoral directives, your praiseworthy efforts in this area will be intensified. As in the early days of the Borgo Ragazzi Don Bosco, today too there are unfortunately many "troubled young people", as they are called, without work and lacking sound guidance, involved in petty crime and given to laziness, with all the risks that a disoriented life implies. Do not abandon these troubled young people and children; offer them sincere friendship and open your hearts to them, so that they will experience the tenderness of divine love.

Dear parishioners of the Young Jesus! Your parish's name itself is an incentive to give the new generations care and attention. This commitment requires the collaboration of all who have educational responsibilities.

The same co-ordination of intentions and efforts is demanded by the missionary work asked of every parish community. Do all you can to make the parish a hospitable home — especially now in this special time of grace which is the City Mission — which excludes no one from the personal proclamation of Jesus, who died and rose for our salvation. A message that should always be accompanied by real attention to the needs of our neighbours, well aware that charity is the best way to open souls to Christ.

Parish of the Young Jesus, imitate the Holy Family of Nazareth. Try to offer yourselves as a peaceful educational environment; enable everyone to breathe a real family atmosphere, promoting collaboration and joint responsibility in the work of evangelization.

5. *“Remember not the events of the past.... See, I am doing something new” (Is 43:18-19)*. The prophet Isaiah invites us today to look closely at the new things God does every day for his faithful. *“See, I am doing something new”*. The Spirit is always at work and his fruits are the marvels he never ceases to accomplish for us.

“Remember not the events of the past”. Do not turn your gaze to the past — says the prophet — turn it rather to Christ “yesterday, today and forever”. In the mystery of his Death and Resurrection, he reversed humanity’s destiny once and for all. In the light of the paschal events, human life is not afraid of death because the Risen One opens the doors of true life to believers. In these last days of Lent between now and the Easter Triduum, let us prepare our hearts to receive the grace of the Redeemer who died and rose, and who strengthens the steps of our faith.

May Mary, who stood silently at the foot of the Cross and then encountered her risen Son, help us prepare worthily to celebrate the Easter feasts.

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