



The Holy See

VISIT TO THE ROMAN PARISH OF OUR LADY OF LORETO (ROME)

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Sunday "in Albis", 11 April 1999

1. *"Eight days later ... the doors were shut, but Jesus came and stood among them, and said, 'Peace be with you'" (Jn 20:26).*

On this Octave of Easter we hear again the greeting of peace which Jesus gave the Apostles on the very day of his Resurrection: "Peace be with you". By his Death and Resurrection, Christ has reconciled us with the Father and offered the precious gift of peace to all who accept it. His redemptive grace makes them witnesses of his peace, committing them to become peacemakers by receiving this supernatural gift of God and expressing it in concrete acts of reconciliation and brotherhood.

How much the world needs genuine peace at the end of this millennium: this need touches individuals, families and the very life of nations! How many situations of tension and war unfortunately remain in the world, in Europe and on other continents! These days our eyes are filled with images of violence and death coming from Kosovo and the Balkans, where a conflict is being waged with tragic consequences. In spite of it all, we do not want to give up the hope of peace. Like Thomas and the other Apostles, we are called in this Easter season to renew our faith in the Lord who conquered sin and death, receiving the gift of peace from him and spreading it in every way we can.

2. Dear brothers and sisters of Our Lady of Loreto Parish in Castelverde! I am pleased at last to be with your community, which I was unable to visit at the beginning of February. I thank the Lord for the opportunity I have been given to be among you this Sunday, traditionally called the Sunday "in Albis". I gladly share with you the joy of the Easter season, expressed repeatedly these days in the psalmist's words: "This is the day which the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it" (Ps

117 [118]:24).

I extend a cordial greeting to the Cardinal Vicar, to the Vicegerent, to your dear parish priest, Fr Patrizio Milano, to his co-workers and to the Franciscan Sisters of the Sacred Hearts, to the members of the parish pastoral council and to all the members of the various groups, associations and movements in the parish. I affectionately greet you all, dear parishioners, recalling in particular the poor and the sick, who are the real "treasure" of your community.

It is not the first time, as you know so well, that your parish community has received a visit from the Successor of Peter. In fact, the Servant of God Pope Paul VI, my venerable Predecessor, the diocesan stage of whose beatification process was concluded a few weeks ago, visited you on 5 March 1967. It is an occasion to be remembered. His visit left a profound impression in people's hearts, but also in the very name of the neighbourhood, which until then had been called Castellaccio. When the Pope saw this rich green area he exclaimed: "It should be called Castelverde, not Castellaccio!". And the municipal administration, promptly heeding his suggestion, changed the neighbourhood's name.

3. Today, over 30 years later, the Pope is with you again. My hope is that our meeting today will be a good occasion for everyone to intensify his journey to God through a stronger Christian life, enlivened by constantly listening to the Word of God, invigorated by frequent reception of the sacraments and marked by a genuine Gospel witness in every circumstance and situation.

Dear brothers and sisters, the risen Lord calls you as individuals and as a parish to proclaim his Gospel in the same way as the apostolic community, described in today's first reading (cf. Acts 2:42-43). You will thus show the value of the faith which motivates you and the depth of your love for Christ (cf. 1 Pt 1:7-8). You will then be blessed, as Jesus promised (Jn 20:29), because, even without being able to touch the marks of the crucifixion on the body of the Risen One as Thomas did, you believe in him and want to be his fearless and generous apostles.

You are supported in this difficult task by the City Mission, a providential opportunity for the new evangelization. I know that in your parish you have laudably continued such an important apostolic initiative this year as well by visiting families, setting up listening centres and trying to bring every resident the Gospel message. I am sure that the Mission will not end with the closing celebration at the solemn Vigil of Pentecost. How could the many expectations which the Mission has awakened in people's hearts be left without adequate answers? So many yearn for a more authentic Christian life, and this desire should be encouraged and supported with appropriate spiritual and missionary initiatives. It is up to you to continue this extraordinary apostolic experience, while taking into account the expectations and challenges of your neighbourhood, which has considerably changed in recent years.

More than 45 years have passed since 1953, when the foundation stone was laid for your church,

placed under the protection of Our Lady of Loreto, so dear to the inhabitants of the Marches, the region from which the majority of Castelverde's first residents came. As the years have passed a certain level of prosperity has been reached, thanks be to God, and many have been able to build homes for their families and children. However, along with social progress, often the fruit of many sacrifices, some typical phenomena of a consumer society have appeared. At times a certain superficiality in living the faith has occurred. There is the risk of turning in on oneself and of not showing concern for the problems of the less fortunate. The crisis of the family is making itself felt, while young people are looking for demanding ways to live so that they will not fall into a mediocre and superficial existence.

4. The risen Lord calls us all to make a renewed apostolic effort: Go, he says to each of us. Go, proclaim the Gospel and do not be afraid! He is with us every day until the end of time. Strengthened by this knowledge, dear brothers and sisters, do not hesitate to be apostles of the Risen One. It is each person's duty, in his name, generously to promote spiritual values such as fidelity, the acceptance and defence of life in all its phases, love of neighbour and perseverance in the faith even amid the inevitable difficulties of daily life. Do not forget that we must reacquire a taste for prayer, so that Christian witness will experience the vigorous reawakening we desire. In this regard, I congratulate you on the beautiful practice of nocturnal prayer which is held in your church on the First Friday of the month. On the occasion of the forthcoming Jubilee, it would be a good idea if similar initiatives could be organized in all the parishes to offer an occasion of authentic spirituality to the pilgrims who will come to Rome.

Let us entrust to Our Lady of Loreto, protectress of your parish, not only the success of this meeting, but the expectations and projects of your entire parish community.

May Our Lady protect you and inspire you with thoughts of peace and reconciliation, so that you will always be able to give an account of the hope that is in you. May she help the residents of this neighbourhood and the community of those from the Marches who live in Rome.

Our Lady of Loreto, pray for us!

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