



# The Holy See

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## JUBILEE YEAR 2000

### OPENING OF THE HOLY DOOR

#### AT THE BASILICA OF SAINT JOHN LATERAN, CATHEDRAL OF ROME

#### *HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II*

Basilica of Saint John Lateran

Christmas, 25 December 1999

1. *"That which was from the beginning ... which we have ... touched with our hands, concerning the Word of life ... we proclaim to you"* (1 Jn 1: 1-2). *Dear Brothers and Sisters!* On this solemn day on which we are commemorating the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ, we perceive the truth, the power and the joy of the Apostle John's words. Yes, in faith, our hands have touched the Word of Life; they have touched the One who, as we recited in the Canticle, is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation. Through him and in him all things were created (cf. Col 1: 15-16). This is the mystery of Christmas that we perceive with deep emotion, especially today, the beginning of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. God entered human history and came to walk the paths of this earth, to enable everyone to become God's children. I ardently hope that this mystery of holiness and hope will fill with its unfading radiance the hearts of Rome's entire diocesan community, gathered in spirit in this Basilica for the solemn opening of the Holy Door. At this intensely spiritual moment, I would like to extend my affectionate good wishes and greetings to the Cardinal Vicar, my first co-worker in caring for the faithful of the Church in the city. With him, I greet the Vicegerent, and the Auxiliary Bishops who work with him in the pastoral service of the Diocese. I also extend a cordial greeting to the Lateran Chapter, to the parish priests, to the entire Roman clergy, to the seminary, and to all, men and women religious and lay pastoral workers who are the chosen part of our Church of Rome, called to preside in charity and to excel in fidelity to the Gospel. I greet the Mayor and the authorities and representatives of the public administration who have wished to be present. I greet the Romans, the pilgrims and everyone who, via television, has joined us for this event of great historical and spiritual importance.

2. After opening the Holy Door in the Vatican Basilica last night, I have just opened the Holy Door of this Lateran Basilica, "*omnium Ecclesiarum Urbis et Orbis Mater et Caput*", Mother and Head of all the churches of Rome and of the world and of the Cathedral of the Bishop of Rome. It was here, in 1300, that Pope Boniface VIII solemnly inaugurated the first Holy Year in history. Here, in the Jubilee of 1423, Pope Martin V opened the Holy Door for the first time. Here is the heart of that special dimension of the history of salvation which is linked to the grace of the Jubilees and the historical memory of the Church of Rome. We have entered through this Door, which represents Christ himself: in fact, he alone is the Saviour, sent by God the Father, who enables us to pass from sin to grace, bringing us into the full communion which unites him

to the Father in the Holy Spirit. Let us give thanks to God, rich in mercy, who gave us his only Son as the Redeemer of man.<sup>3</sup> We could say that this evening's rite takes on a more familiar dimension. Indeed the diocesan family is setting out on its own jubilee journey, in special unity with the Churches spread throughout the world. It has been preparing for this great event for a long time, first through the Synod and then with the City Mission. The devout participation of the city and of the whole Diocese testifies that Rome is aware of the mission of universal concern and of exemplarity in faith and love which God's Providence has entrusted to it. Rome knows well that this service is rooted in the martyrdom of the Apostles Peter and Paul and has always found new sustenance in the witness of the multitude of martyrs and saints who have marked the history of our Church.

Dear brothers and sisters, the Holy Year, which begins today, calls us too to continue on this road. It invites us to respond joyfully and generously to the call to holiness, to be increasingly a sign of hope in today's society, on its way to the third millennium.<sup>4</sup> During the Holy Year there will be many occasions for believers to deepen this religious commitment, which is closely connected with the Jubilee programme. First of all, the diocesan Jubilee, which will take place on 28 May in St Peter's Square. Another event, entrusted in a particular way to the Diocese of Rome, is the International Eucharistic Congress, which will be held, please God, from 18 to 25 June.<sup>5</sup> The third significant event is the 15th World Youth Day. With young people and families. My thoughts turn to the World Meeting of Families which will be held on 14 and 15 October 2000. Thus so many important events await us! Let us entrust them all to the motherly intercession of Mary, Health of the Roman People. May she accompany us and guide our steps so that this year will be a time of extraordinary spiritual grace and social renewal.<sup>6</sup> Church of Rome, today the Lord comes to visit you to open before you this year of grace and mercy! In crossing the threshold of the Holy Door in humble pilgrimage, may you receive his gifts of forgiveness and love. May you grow in faith and in missionary zeal: this is the principal legacy of the Apostles Peter and Paul. How many times during your 2,000 year-old history have you experienced the marvels of the coming of Christ, who made you mother in the faith and a beacon of civilization for many peoples! May the Great Jubilee, with which you are preparing to begin the new millennium, strengthen you, Rome, in the joy of faithfully following your Lord, and give you an ever ardent desire to proclaim his Gospel. This is your particular contribution to building an era of justice, peace and holiness. Amen! © Copyright 1999 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana