



The Holy See

VISIT TO ST MARY STAR OF THE SEA PARISH IN CASTEL FUSANO
ON THE OSTIA SEASHORE (ROME)

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Second Sunday of Lent, 28 February 1999

1. *"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased"* (Mt 17:5).

The Father's invitation to the disciples who were privileged witnesses of the extraordinary event of the Transfiguration still echoes today for us and for all the Church. Like Peter, James and John, we too are invited to climb Mount Tabor with Jesus and to let ourselves be awed by the splendour of his glory. On this Second Sunday of Lent, we contemplate Christ enveloped in light, in the company of Moses and Elijah, authoritative spokesmen of the Old Testament. To him we renew our personal adherence: he is the Father's "beloved Son".

Listen to him! This pressing appeal spurs us to intensify our Lenten journey. It is an invitation to let the light of Christ illumine our life and give us the strength to proclaim and bear witness to the Gospel to our brothers and sisters. It is a task, as we know well, which sometimes means hardship and suffering. This is also stressed by St Paul, who says to his faithful disciple Timothy: *"Take your share of suffering for the Gospel"* (2 Tm 1:8).

The experience of Jesus' Transfiguration prepares the Apostles to face the tragic events of Calvary by showing them in advance what will be the full and definitive revelation of the Master's glory in the paschal mystery. Meditating on this Gospel passage, we too are preparing to relive the decisive events of the Lord's Death and Resurrection, following him on the way of the Cross to attain light and glory. Indeed, we must first "suffer and so come to the glory of his Resurrection" (*Preface*).

2. Dear brothers and sisters of St Mary Star of the Sea Parish! I am delighted to be the guest of your beautiful community; although it is geographically very far from where the Bishop of Rome lives, it is nevertheless very close to his Pastor's heart and always present in his prayers, as are all

the other Roman parishes.

I affectionately greet the Cardinal Vicar and the Auxiliary Bishop of this area. We cannot forget that for many years this task was carried out by Bishop Riva, who is now ill. Let us pray for his health. I also greet your dear parish priest, Fr Francesco Dell'Uomo, the priests who work with him, and everyone present. I extend a special greeting to all the residents of Ostia.

I also greet the groups who meet in the parish and participate in the formation and catechetical programmes that have the essential objective of learning how to live the Gospel ever more deeply in everyday life. It is in the places where we study, live, work and suffer that we especially feel the need to bear witness by concrete acts to the Good News of salvation.

3. Dear young people, I offer you my heartfelt encouragement to continue on your spiritual journey personally and as a group, so that you can grow in your awareness of belonging to the Church. My presence today is meant as an invitation to all but especially to you, dear young people, to be Christ's apostles in this area, so that the Gospel message can be a leaven of authentic progress and fraternal solidarity.

Dear young people! The Pope has confidence in you and invites you to bring the Gospel into the new millennium, now ever closer, with your characteristic energy and sincerity. May the World Youth Day of the Year 2000, which will be held in Rome in August of the Holy Year, also find you, young people of this parish, ready to welcome your peers who will come from various countries. In everyday life at school, or wherever you gather or enjoy healthy recreation, be ready to share the one faith in Christ, Redeemer of man, and the joy of being united in the embrace of the same Church, founded on the testimony of the Apostles Peter and Paul. Be "missionaries" of fidelity and hope in this Church which belongs to you and in which each person has his own mission to fulfil.

4. Dear parishioners of St Mary Star of the Sea, I know that in your community special care is given to the sacrament of Penance or Confession. I am pleased with this and thank the Lord. In this important season of Lent, intensified by its coincidence with the year dedicated to reflection on God the Father, I once again urge you to approach with trust this sacrament of spiritual healing. It makes sacramentally present Jesus' call to conversion and the path that leads us back to the Father, from whom man distances himself through sin. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* recalls, this sacrament consecrates the Christian sinner's personal and ecclesial steps of penance and conversion (cf. n. 1423).

For the sacrament of Penance to be truly celebrated, it is necessary that the confession of sins arise from serious and careful reflection on the Word of God and living contact with the person of Christ. For this purpose, an appropriate catechesis is needed, as the Catechism recalls, which aims at putting people in communion with Jesus, for only he can lead us to the love of the Father in the Holy Spirit and make us share in the life of the Holy Trinity (cf. n. 426).

5. O God, "who gave us the joy of walking in the light of the Gospel, open our hearts to hear your Son" (*Collect, Messale Romano*, p. 969). This is how we prayed at the beginning of our Eucharistic celebration. Pastoral work is entirely aimed at this openness of spirit, so that the believer can listen to the word of the Lord and docilely accept his will. Truly listening to God means obeying him. From this flows the apostolic zeal indispensable for evangelizing: only those who deeply know the Lord and are converted to his love can become his courageous heralds and witnesses in every circumstance.

Is it not precisely from knowing Christ, his person, his love and his truth that those who experience him personally feel an irresistible desire to proclaim him to everyone, to evangelize and to lead others to the discovery of the faith? I sincerely hope that each of you will be more and more inspired by this longing for Christ, the source of genuine missionary spirit.

6. "*Abram went, as the Lord had told him*" (Gn 12:4).

An exemplary and model believer, Abraham trusts in God. Called by Yahweh, he leaves his land with all its security, sustained only by his faith and trusting obedience in his Lord. God calls him to take the "risk" of faith, he obeys, and thus becomes the father in faith of all believers.

Like Abraham, we too would like to continue our Lenten journey, renouncing our security and abandoning ourselves to God's will. Let us take heart in the certainty that the Lord is faithful to his promises, despite our weakness and our sins.

With a truly repentant spirit, let us make our own the words of the *Responsorial Psalm*: "Our soul waits for the Lord... Let your steadfast love, O Lord, be upon us, even as we hope in you".

Blessed Virgin, Star of evangelization, help us to understand your Son's words and to proclaim them generously and consistently to our brethren. Mary, Star of the Sea, protect this parish community, the residents of Ostia and the whole Diocese of Rome!

Amen!