



The Holy See

CELEBRATION OF FIRST VESPERS OF THE SOLEMNITY OF MARY, MOTHER OF GOD AND 'TE DEUM' FOR THE END OF YEAR

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Friday 31 December 1999

1. *"When the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman"* (Gal 4: 4).

What is *"the fullness of time"* of which the Apostle speaks? Experience teaches us that *time passes* relentlessly. All creatures are subject to the passage of time. Only man, however, is aware of his own passing in time. He realizes that his personal history is tied to the flow of days.

Aware of its own "passing", humanity writes its own history: the history of individuals, States and continents, the history of cultures and religions. Let us ask ourselves this evening: what, above all else, has marked the millennium now ending? How did the geography of countries, the situation of peoples and nations appear a thousand years ago? Who knew then of the existence of another great continent to the west of the Atlantic Ocean? The discovery of America, which gave rise to a new era in humanity's history, is certainly a distinctive element in evaluating the millennium now ending.

This last century has also been marked by profound and sometimes rapid upheavals, which have influenced culture and relations between peoples. Let it suffice to think of the two oppressive ideologies, responsible for countless victims, which have spent themselves in this century. What sufferings, what tragedies! But also what exalting achievements! These years, entrusted to humanity by the Creator, are marked by man's efforts, failures and triumphs (cf. *Gaudium et spes*, n. 2).

The greatest risk at this epochal turning point is perhaps that "many of our contemporaries are prevented by this complex situation from recognizing permanent values and duly applying them to

recent discoveries" (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 4). This is a great challenge for us men and women on the point of entering the Year 2000.

2. "*When the time had fully come!*". The liturgy tells us of the "*fullness of time*" and enlightens us on the *meaning of this "fullness"*. God chose to send his eternal Word into the history of the great human family, having him take on our human nature. It was through the sublime event of the Incarnation that human and cosmic time achieved true fullness: "*When the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman ... that we might receive adoption as sons*" (*Gal 4: 4-5*). Here is the great mystery: the eternal Word of God, *Verbum Patris*, became present in the events that constitute man's history on earth. With the Incarnation of the Son of God, eternity entered time and human history was opened to a transcendent fulfilment in the absoluteness of God. Human beings are thus offered an inconceivable prospect: they can aspire to be sons of the Son, heirs with him to the same glorious destiny. The earthly pilgrimage is thus a journey that occurs in God's time. Its goal is God himself, the fullness of time in eternity.

3. In the eyes of faith, time assumes a religious meaning and even more so during the Jubilee Year which has just begun. Christ is the Lord of time. Every moment of human time is under the sign of the Redemption of the Lord, who, once and for all, entered the "*fullness of time*" (cf. *Tertio millennio adveniente*, n. 10). In this perspective let us thank God for all that has happened this year, this century and this millennium. In a special way, we give thanks for the continual progress in the spiritual world. Let us give thanks for the saints of this millennium: those raised to the honours of the altar and, even more numerous, those unknown to us who sanctified time by their faithful adherence to God's will. Let us also give thanks for all of humanity's triumphs and successes in the fields of science, technology, art and culture.

With regard to the Diocese of Rome, let us give thanks for the spiritual journey made in past years and, with a view to the Great Jubilee, for having completed the *City Mission*. I remember that evening of 22 May, the Vigil of Pentecost, when we prayed together to the Holy Spirit that in the new century this special pastoral experience would become a form and model for the Church's life and pastoral care in Rome and in all the other countries and cities of the world, at the service of the new evangelization.

As we give thanks to God, we feel the need at the same time to implore him to have mercy on the millennium which is ending. We ask forgiveness because unfortunately, technological and scientific discoveries, so important for genuine human progress, have frequently been used against man: *Miserere nostri, Domine, miserere nostri!*

4. Two thousand years have passed since "*the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father*" (*Jn 1: 14*). This is why the hymn of our praise and gratitude is unanimously raised: *Te Deum laudamus*.

We praise you, God of life and hope.

We praise you, Christ, King of glory, eternal Son of the Father.

Born of the Virgin Mother, you are our Redeemer, you became our brother for man's salvation, and you will come in glory to judge the world at the end of time.

You, Christ, the goal of human history, are the focal point of the expectations of every human being.

The years and the centuries belong to you. Time is yours, O Christ, who are the same yesterday, today and for ever.

Amen!

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