



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT TO ST. ALPHONSUS MARY LIGUORI PARISH

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Sunday, 4 February 2001

1. "*Duc in altum! - Put out into the deep!*" (Lk 5: 4). Jesus' invitation to the Apostle Peter is the dominant theme of today's liturgy for the Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time.

I used these same words in the Apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte*, which I signed during the closing celebration of the Holy Year. In it, after having reviewed the fundamental elements that marked the Jubilee experience, I indicated the *guidelines* for the Church's life and her evangelizing mission in the third millennium.

"*Master ... at your word I will let down the nets*" (Lk 5: 5). This is how Simon Peter responds to Christ's invitation. He does not hide his disappointment over the unsuccessful labour of a whole night; yet he obeys the Master: he sets aside his own beliefs as a fisherman who knows his job well, and trusts in him. We know what happens next. Seeing the nets full of fish, Peter realizes the distance between him, "a sinful man", and the one he now recognizes as "Lord". He feels *interiorly transformed*, and at the Master's invitation he leaves his nets and follows him. The fisherman of Galilee thus becomes an apostle of Christ, the rock on which Christ will found his Church.

2. Today I have the joy of making my first pastoral visit to a Roman parish since the extraordinary event of grace of the Great Jubilee. Your Church is not located far from the place called *Saxa Rubra*, where in the year 312, according to tradition, the Cross mysteriously appeared. "*In hoc signo vinces*": these words, well known to you, are linked to those we heard today: "*Duc in altum - Put out into the deep*". Trusting in Christ leads to sharing the journey of suffering and death with him. But what humanly appears to be a defeat, significantly expressed in the mystery of the Cross, *becomes the guarantee of sure and definitive victory*.

These considerations call to mind *Fr Eulogio Carballido Diaz*, the generous and beloved pastor who guided this community for 25 years. He loved to make a pilgrimage every year to *Saxa Rubra* accompanied by many of you to venerate the image of the Immaculate Virgin, Mother of God, which I myself had the joy of crowning. May the Lord, who one year ago suddenly called him to himself, grant him the heavenly reward prepared for his good and faithful servants.

3. I greet you all with affection, dear brothers and sisters of *St Alphonsus Mary Liguori Parish!* I especially greet the

Cardinal Vicar, the Auxiliary Bishop of the Northern Sector, Fr Stefano Alberici, your parish priest, his assistant priests and the representatives of the children and the young people, to whom I extend my gratitude for the kind words of welcome offered at the beginning of this celebration. My cordial thoughts also turn to the women religious of the two communities present in the parish: the Franciscan Sisters of Susa and the Little Daughters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary.

I especially greet you, dear parishioners of St Alphonsus, who have gathered in such large numbers for this Sunday Mass, as well as all the inhabitants of the area, which in these years has seen the growth of new and modern residential centres next to the first rural settlements and those rebuilt after the terrible flood of 1965.

4. *"Duc in altum! - Put out into the deep!"*. What does this mean for you, dear brothers and sisters of this parish, *"to put out into the deep"* at the beginning of the new millennium? The first residents of this Roman suburb, who migrated here from central and southern Italy, brought with them a simple and sincere faith, with solid religious traditions. Under the guidance of a zealous parish priest, an active and vigilant community was thus built in fidelity to Christ and in solidarity with those who are in difficult straits.

Certainly here, as elsewhere, there have been and are problems and trials. However, together with St Paul, today you too can say that the grace of God in you has not been in vain (cf. 1 Cor 15: 10). The many good seeds sown over the years are bearing abundant fruit. Thanks to the new parish complex opened on 1 October last, your parish now has a suitable place for welcoming and forming the residents of the neighbourhood, with special attention to children and young people.

Therefore, looking at all the good that has already grown among you, I say to you: *"Put out into the deep!"* Become, as individuals and as a community, *missionaries of the Lord's love*. Be concerned for every man and woman who lives and works in this area, following the example of your heavenly patron, St Alphonsus, who was ever anxious to evangelize.

5. Broadening our gaze, then, we may ask: what does *"put out into the deep"* mean for our diocesan community? Does it not mean to set out anew from Christ in order to bring everyone the news of salvation?

In this regard, I know that the entire Diocese is diligently preparing for the *convention that will take place next June*. I myself have wanted it to be a great meeting that will be useful for drawing up, on the basis of the City Mission experience, the basic programme for a constant "mobilization" in service to the Gospel.

This important time of reflection and sharing will not fail to give a permanent missionary thrust to diocesan pastoral ministry. It will also help to increase sensitivity to the present moment, in which it is possible and necessary *to live consistently* as Christians in all areas of life, work and service.

6. *"I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God which is with me"* (1 Cor 15: 10). The words of the Apostle Paul, which we heard in the second reading, show us the right way to understand the value of our efforts: the achievement of what we propose certainly depends on our good will, but it depends above all on the grace of God. The pastoral journey of your parish, like that of the Diocese and of the entire Church, must therefore be essentially

a *journey of holiness*, in the ever deeper following of the One who is thrice holy by antonomasia (cf. *Is* 6: 3).

May we be accompanied in this journey of faith, hope and love by the Blessed Virgin, the shining Dawn and sure Guide as we travel the roads of the world and of history. Let us imitate her in contemplation and meditate on the Mystery of Christ in our hearts (cf. *Lk* 2: 51). Let us follow her in persevering and united prayer, in communion with the Apostles and the entire Ecclesial Community (cf. *Acts* 1: 14). Let us welcome her invitation to trust in her Son: "Do whatever he tells you" (*Jn* 2: 5).

And you, Mary, Star of the New Millennium, pray for us! Amen.