



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT TO THE ROMAN PARISH OF ST. DOMINIC DE GUZMÁN

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Sunday, 25 March 2001

1. *"We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God"* (2 Cor 5: 20). Today, the Fourth Sunday of Lent, the Apostle Paul's words ring out with special eloquence. They are a powerful call to conversion and reconciliation with God. They are an invitation to set out on a journey of authentic spiritual renewal. In experiencing the merciful love of our heavenly Father, the believer in turn becomes a herald and witness of the extraordinary gift offered to all humanity in the crucified and risen Christ.

In this regard the Apostle recalls: "All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself" (ibid., 5: 18). He adds that God continues to appeal through us, "entrusting to us the message of reconciliation" (ibid., 5: 19). The mission of proclaiming reconciliation is the task, first of all, of the Apostles and their successors; it also involves every Christian according to the responsibilities and ways appropriate to his state in life. We are all called, therefore, to be "missionaries of reconciliation" in our words and in our lives.

2. *"Be reconciled to God!"*. Making Paul's exhortation my own, I am pleased to greet you all, dear brothers and sisters of St Dominic de Guzmán Parish and those who live in the suburb of Cinquina! As I continue my pastoral pilgrimage to the parish communities of Rome, I have the joy of being among you today. I affectionately greet the Cardinal Vicar, the Auxiliary Bishop for this sector, your zealous parish priest, Fr Paolo Corsi, the parochial vicar and the other priests. I greet the religious and all who actively work in the various pastoral activities. I greet the families, the elderly, the sick and those who were unable to be with us, but are spiritually united with us. I thank those who, in the name of the whole parish family, addressed kind words of welcome to me at the beginning of Holy Mass.

I extend a special greeting to you, dear young people, who make a significant contribution by the freshness of your enthusiasm. Let me take this occasion to remind you of our important meeting on Thursday, 5 April, in St Peter's Square at 5.00 p.m. Together with your other peers from Rome, we will gather to pray and prepare ourselves for the 16th World Youth Day which, as you know, is celebrated this year in the individual Dioceses on Palm Sunday. I also greet you, dear children, and thank you for your warm welcome.

3. Today's liturgy, filled with appeals for forgiveness and reconciliation, gives us some helpful encouragement for a review of our personal and community life. Furthermore, what an appropriate opportunity it offers your parish for reflecting on its past history, its present commitment and its future prospects!

In the almost 27 years since its foundation, your parish has made remarkable efforts to accommodate the many families that have come to live here. Now it is necessary to take a determined step forward, putting the primary emphasis on evangelization through suitable courses of Christian formation. Your parish community has already embarked on this pastoral journey by actively participating in the City Mission and the celebration of the Great Jubilee. Another providential stage on this journey will be the Diocesan Convention that will take place this June, for which I invite you to prepare with care and especially with prayer.

You are faced with a demanding challenge. As you yourselves observe, you must organize a real course of faith formation that involves those who will receive the sacraments of Christian initiation and which continues through adolescence and young adulthood, and later involves engaged couples and families. To this end, you can make the most of the various existing methods, from catechesis to interesting youth activities, such as the "post-Confirmation" meetings for children, summer camps, theatre workshops and after-school activities, including those intended for small children. An increasingly active presence of lay people in the structures of pastoral participation should also be encouraged. It is equally important to encourage the collaboration of the faithful in parish life through membership in Church associations, groups and movements, and in the opportunities offered by Caritas and the Vincentian Volunteer Service.

4. To carry out this vast apostolic programme, dedication to prayer and to hearing God's word is the first thing necessary. I know that in the parish you have various prayer meetings and weekly Eucharistic adoration: I congratulate you. May the heart of every project and missionary plan, dear brothers and sisters, always be Holy Mass, celebrated with faith and joy especially on Sunday, the "*Lord's Day*".

By contemplating the face of Christ, who died and rose for us, and by celebrating his presence in the Eucharist, you will be able to continue more faithfully and courageously in the great task of the "new evangelization". It is a pressing duty. Indeed, your neighbourhood has not been spared the challenge of sects. I must tell you to make every effort to proclaim the Gospel to your children and

to all people of good will, just as the Church has proclaimed it for 2,000 years. Clearly present the truths of the Christian faith, always accompanying them with the language of love and brotherhood that everyone can understand.

5. *"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold the new has come"* (2 Cor 5: 17). That is exactly how it is: in Christ everything is renewed and hope is constantly reborn, even after sad and bitter experiences. The parable of the "Prodigal Son", better described as the parable of the "Merciful Father", proclaimed at our gathering today, assures us that the heavenly Father's merciful love can radically change the attitude of every prodigal son: it can make him a new creation.

He who, after sinning against heaven, was lost and had died is now truly pardoned and restored to life. An extraordinary wonder of God's mercy! The Church's mission is to proclaim and share with all people the great treasure of the "Gospel of mercy".

This is the source of the joy that pervades the liturgy of this Sunday, called precisely "*Laetare* Sunday", from the first Latin words of the entrance antiphon. It is the joy of the ancient people of Israel, who were able to celebrate their first Passover and enjoy the fruits of the promised land after 40 years of journeying in the desert. It is also the joy of all of us who, after observing the 40 days of Lent, will relive the paschal mystery.

May we be accompanied on this journey by Mary, who with the "*fiat*" of the Annunciation opened the doors of humanity to the gift of salvation. Through her intercession may we say our "yes" each day to Christ, so as to be ever more fully "reconciled to God". Amen.