



The Holy See

TE DEUM AND FIRST VESPERS OF THE SOLEMNITY OF MARY,
MOTHER OF GOD

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Monday 31 December 2001

1. *"Lord, is this the hour?"*: how often man asks this question, especially in history's dramatic moments! He has an acute desire to know the meaning and dynamics of the individual and community events in which he finds himself involved. He would like to know "in advance" what will happen "later", so as not to be taken by surprise.

Indeed, the Apostles were not free from this desire. *However, Jesus did not favour their curiosity.* Whenever he was asked this question, he would answer that it is heavenly Father only who knows and fixes the times and seasons (cf. Acts 1,7; but he added: *"you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses ... to the end of the earth"* (Acts 1,8). In other words, he asked them *to adopt a "new" attitude* towards time.

Jesus urges us not to pry, uselessly, into what is reserved for God to know - precisely the course of events - but to use the time that each of us is granted - the present - to work with filial love to spread the Gospel to every corner of the earth. This reflection is particularly appropriate for us, at the end of the year and a few hours before the beginning of the new year.

2. *"When the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman"* (Gal 4,4). Before Jesus was born, man was subject to the tyranny of time, like a slave who has no idea what his master is thinking. However, when *"The Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us"* (Jn 1,14), this perspective was completely reversed.

On the Christmas night that we celebrated a week ago, the Eternal One entered history, the "not yet" of time, marked by the ongoing succession of days, and mysteriously became the "already" of the manifestation of the Son of God. In the unfathomable mystery of the Incarnation, time attains

its fullness. God embraces the history of men and women on earth to bring it to its definitive fulfillment.

For us believers therefore, *the meaning and end of history* and of every human event are recapitulated *in Christ*. In Him, the eternal Word made flesh in Mary's womb, eternity takes hold of you, because God wanted to make himself visible, in order to reveal the depth of history and the goal of the labour of every living person on earth.

That is why, in this liturgy, as we take our leave of 2001, we feel the need to renew with deep joy our gratitude to God who has introduced us into his mystery in his Son, giving rise to the new and definitive age.

3. *Te Deum laudamus, /Te Dominum confitemur.*

With the words of the ancient hymn, we express to God our deep thanks for all the good he has bestowed upon us in the past 12 months.

Whilst the many events of 2001 flash through our minds, I would like to greet with affection the *Cardinal Vicar*, accompanied by the *Auxiliary Bishops* and *numerous parish priests*, my precious collaborators in pastoral service to the Church of Rome. I extend my greeting to the *Mayor of Rome*, and to the members of the Regional Board and City Council as well as to the other authorities present and those who are here as representatives of other urban institutions.

From this Basilica, so dear to Rome's inhabitants, may my best wishes reach out *to the entire population of the city*, and especially those who are spending these holidays amid hardships and problems. I assure everyone that I keep you present in intense and fervent prayer, as I invite each one to continue his life of service, trusting in Providence, ever loving in his mysterious designs.

4. The echo of the *Great Jubilee* still rings strongly in our city. It made a deep impression on the life of Rome and its citizens, spreading great riches of grace in the community of believers. *The Diocesan Assembly* of June 2001, that was extensively prepared within parishes and ecclesial communities, renewed the commitment to the permanent mission, as a goal for the coming years, in accord with the suggestions of the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio ineunte* and the follow up in the diocesan pastoral programme.

Rome feels a constant need to proclaim Christ and to be one with him in listening to his word, in the Eucharist and in charity. May apostolic zeal grow in the hearts of priests, men and women religious and the many lay people who have understood their call to be witnesses of the Lord among their families and in the workplace.

I repeat to everyone what I wrote in the Message I sent to the Diocesan Assembly ""Put out into

the deep', in order to bring the Gospel into homes, workplaces, neighbourhoods and the entire city" (n. 4).

May every Christian community be a school of prayer and a place for training in holiness, a family of families, where acceptance of the Lord and brotherhood around the Eucharist are expressed in the enthusiasm of a renewed evangelization.

5. In connection with the permanent mission there is another great objective, mentioned in the diocesan pastoral programme, which will be the object of special reflection at the *Diocesan Convention* in June 2002: *the ministry of recruiting vocations*.

Every parish and community is called to pray constantly so that the Lord will send workers to his harvest, and for a dynamic and confident work of formation among young people and families, so that God's call may be understood with its liberating power and accepted with joy and gratitude.

I turn especially to you, dear pastors and priests, to ensure that the joy of being Christ's ministers and the generosity of your service to the Church may define your services. This is an important condition if the ministry for recruiting is to be effective. At the root of every priestly and religious vocation there is almost always a priest who, by his example and spiritual direction, set the person who is searching on a path of "gift" and "mystery" and accompanied him.

6. *Te Deum laudamus!* This hymn of praise and thanksgiving rises from our hearts this evening: thanksgiving for the benefits received, for the apostolic goals achieved, for the good that has been done. In particular, I would like to give thanks for the 300 parishes of our city that I have so far been able to visit. I ask God for the strength to continue faithfully, as long as he wills, to serve the Church of Rome and the whole world.

At the end of a year, dear brothers and sisters, it is particularly fitting to be aware of our own fragility and of the times when we have not been entirely faithful to the love of God. Let us ask the Lord's forgiveness for our failures and omissions: *Miserere nostri, Domine, miserere nostri*. Let us continue to abandon ourselves with confidence to the Lord's goodness. He will not fail to treat us mercifully and to help us continue in our apostolic mission.

7. *In Te, Domine, speravi: non confundar in aeternum!* Let us entrust ourselves and abandon ourselves to your keeping, Lord of time and eternity. You are our hope: the hope of Rome and of the world: the pillar of the weak and the comfort of the bewildered, the joy and peace of those who welcome and love you.

As this year draws to a close and we are already looking towards the new one, our hearts confidently embrace your mysterious plans of salvation.

Fiat misericordia tua, Domine, super nos, quaemadmodum speravimus in Te.

May your mercy always be with us: in you have we hoped. Our hope is in you alone, O Christ, Son of the Virgin Mary, your loving Mother and ours.