



The Holy See

***PRAYER OF THE HOLY FATHER
FOR THE SOLEMNITY OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION
OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY***

Wednesday 8 December 1999

As we do every year on this day
so dear to the Christian people,
we are gathered here, in the heart of the city,
to offer once again our traditional floral tribute
to the Blessed Virgin, at the foot of the column
which Romans raised in honour
of her Immaculate Conception.

Today's celebration, on the eve of the Great Jubilee,
is a special preparation for our encounter
with Christ, *"who abolished death
and brought life and immortality to light
through the Gospel"* (2 Tm 1: 10).

This is how Scripture presents the saving mission
of the Son of God.

The Blessed Virgin, whom we contemplate
today in the mystery of the Immaculate Conception,
invites us to turn our gaze to the Redeemer,
born in the poverty of Bethlehem for our salvation.

Let us contemplate with her the gift

of the incarnation of God's Son, who
came among us to give meaning to human history.

May the prophet Isaiah's words echo in our hearts:
"The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light" (9: 2).

Mary is the radiant dawn of this day of sure hope.
Mary is the Mother of Christ, who became man
to inaugurate the new times foretold by the prophets.
With Mary, the "dawn of Redemption",
we are observing Advent, a time of joyous
expectation, contemplation and hope.

Just as the rising of the sun is foretold
in the heavens by the morning star,
so the *incarnation of the Son of God*,
"the Dayspring" (*Lk 1: 78*), is preceded
by the *immaculate conception of the Virgin Mary*.

It is a sublime mystery of grace,
which we sense even more deeply this year,
at the end of a millennium
and the imminent beginning of the Jubilee Year.

Today we have hastened with deeper trust
to the Blessed Virgin's feet, asking her to help us
cross, with renewed commitment, the threshold
of the Holy Door, which will lead us
into the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000.

He will cross this threshold
with full awareness, supported and encouraged
by your help, O Immaculate Virgin.

Two thousand years ago in Bethlehem of Judea,
you gave birth to the Conqueror of death
and the Author of life, who through the Gospel
made all human life resplendent.

Christ came among us to restore full dignity

to man created in God's image.

Yes, human beings cannot remain in darkness;
they yearn for the true Light to illumine
their steps on this earthly pilgrimage.

Man does not love death:

endowed with a spiritual nature, he yearns
for the immortality of his whole being.

Jesus destroyed the power of death by his blood
and made it possible for this deep longing
of the human heart to be satisfied.

As we look to you, Virgin chosen
and full of grace, we pilgrims on earth
see the promise of immortality fulfilled
in complete communion with God.

The Apostle's words are fulfilled in you,
Mother of the living, as the first-fruits of glory:
the Lord Jesus "*abolished death
and brought life and immortality to light*".

This year too, on the threshold
of a new millennium, the Church
repeats this joyful message.

This is why today we come once again
to your feet, Immaculate Virgin full of Grace,
to implore you, who have become the voice
of the entire Christian people, to accept our tribute,
the expression of our faith and devotion,
as, with deep gratitude, we pass on
to the next millennium the beautiful tradition
of this devout meeting with you
at the column in Piazza di Spagna.

And you, Immaculate Virgin Mary, pray for us!
