



The Holy See

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT FIRST VESPERS
PRESIDED BY HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XV MEETING WITH STUDENTS OF ROME'S
UNIVERSITIES AND ATHENEUM

HOMILY

Vatican Basilica
Saturday, 1 December 2012

[\[Video\]](#)

[Photo gallery](#)

“He who calls you is faithful” (1 Thess 5:24).

Dear University Students,

The Apostle Paul’s words guide us to understanding the true meaning of the Liturgical Year which we are beginning this evening with the recitation of First Vespers of Advent. The whole journey of the Church Year is orientated to discovering and living fidelity to the God of Jesus Christ who will be presented to us once again, in the Grotto of Bethlehem, in the face of a Child. The entire history of salvation is a journey of love, mercy and benevolence: from Creation to the liberation of the People of Israel from slavery in Egypt, to the gift of the Law on Sinai, to the return to the homeland from the Babylonian captivity. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was always the close God who never abandoned his People. On several occasions he suffered their infidelity with sadness and patiently awaited their return, ever with the freedom of a love that precedes and sustains the beloved, attentive to his or her dignity and deepest expectations.

God did not withdraw into his heaven but lowered himself to man’s experience: a great mystery that succeeds in surpassing every possible expectation. God entered human time in the most unthinkable way: by making himself a child and going through the stages of human life, so that our whole existence, spirit, soul and body — as St Paul has reminded us — might be kept blameless and be raised to God’s heights. And he did all this out of his faithful love for humanity. When love

is true, by its nature it strives for the good of others, for their greatest possible good. It is not limited merely to respecting the commitments of friendship that have been taken on, but goes further, without calculation or measure. This is precisely what the living, true God did, whose profound mystery is revealed to us in St John's words: "God is love" (1 Jn 4:8, 16). In Jesus of Nazareth this God takes upon himself the whole of humanity, the whole history of man, and he gives it a decisive reorientation toward a new manner of human existence, characterized by having been generated by God and by aspiring to him (cf. *Jesus of Nazareth*, vol. 3, *The Infancy Narratives*).

Dear young people, distinguished rectors and professors, it is a cause of great joy to me to share these reflections with you who represent Rome's university world. In this world, while retaining their own specific identities, converge Rome's state and private universities and the pontifical institutions that have developed together for so many years, bearing a lively witness to a fertile dialogue and cooperation among the different branches of knowledge and theology. I greet and thank the Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation for Catholic Education, the Rector of the Foro Italico University of Rome and your representative, for his words to me on behalf of all. I greet with deep cordiality the Cardinal Vicar and the Minister of Education, Universities and Research, as well as the various academic authorities present.

I greet you with special affection, dear young university students of the Roman Athenaeums, who have renewed your profession of faith at the Apostle Peter's Tomb. In this period you are preparing for the great decisions of your life and for service in the Church and in society. This evening you can feel that you are not alone. With you are the university teachers and chaplains, as well as the animators of the colleges. The Pope is with you! And, above all you are integrated into the great academic community of Rome, in which it is possible to proceed in prayer, research, exchanges, and in bearing witness to the Gospel. It is a precious gift for your life; may you be able to see it as a sign of fidelity to God, who offers you opportunities to conform your existence to that of Christ, to let yourselves be sanctified by him to the point of perfection (cf. 1 Thess 5:23).

The liturgical year that we are beginning with these Vespers also represents for you the journey to live once again the mystery of this faithfulness of God, on which you are called to found your lives, as on a firm rock. In celebrating and living this itinerary of faith with the whole Church, you will experience that Jesus Christ is the one Lord of the cosmos and of history, without whom every human project risks coming to nothing. The liturgy, lived in its true spirit, is always the fundamental school for living the Christian faith, a "theological" faith which involves you in your whole being — spirit, soul and body — to make you living stones in the edifice of the Church and collaborators of the New Evangelization. Especially in the Eucharist the living God makes himself so close that he becomes food that supports us on the journey, a presence that transforms us with the fire of his love.

Dear friends, we are living in a context in which we often come across indifference to God.

However, I think that in the inner depths of all those who live far from God — also among your peers — there is an inner longing for the infinite, for transcendence. It is your task to witness in the university halls to the close God who also shows himself in the search for the truth, the soul of all intellectual commitment.

In this regard, I express my pleasure and encouragement at seeing the university pastoral programme entitled: “The Father saw him from afar. The today of man, the today of God”, proposed by the Vicariate of Rome’s Office for Campus Ministry. Faith is the door that God opens in our lives to lead us to the encounter with Christ, in which the presence of the human meets the today of God. The Christian faith is not adherence to a generic or indefinite God but to the living God who in Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, entered our history and revealed himself as the Redeemer of man. Believing means entrusting one’s life to the One who alone can give it fullness in time and open it to a hope beyond time.

In this [Year of Faith](#) the invitation, that I wish to address to the entire academic community of Rome, is to reflect on faith. The continuous dialogue between the State or private universities and the Pontifical universities promises hope for an ever more meaningful presence of the Church in the context of a culture that is not only Roman but also Italian and international. The Cultural Weeks and the International Symposium of Teachers which will be held next June will be an example of this experience, which I hope it will be possible to repeat in all the university towns with State, private and Pontifical athenaeums.

Dear friends, “He who calls you is faithful, and he will do it” (1 Thess 5:24); he will make you heralds of his presence. In this evening’s prayer let us set out in spirit toward the Bethlehem Grotto in order to taste the true joy of Christmas: the joy of welcoming at the centre of our life, after the example of the Virgin Mary and of St Joseph, that Child who reminds us that God’s eyes are open on the world and on every man and woman (cf. Zech 12:4). God’s gaze is focused on us because he is faithful to his love! Only this certainty can lead humanity towards goals of peace and prosperity, in this delicate and complex period of history.

Moreover the next World Youth Day in Rio de Janeiro will be a great opportunity for you young university students to demonstrate the historical fruitfulness of God’s fidelity, offering your witness and commitment for the moral and social renewal of the world.

The handing over of the Icon of Mary *Sedes Sapientiae* to the Brazilian University Delegation by the university chaplaincy of Roma Tre that is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year is a sign of this common commitment of yours as young university students of Rome.

I entrust to Mary, Seat of Wisdom, all of you and your loved ones; the studies, teaching and life of the athenaeums; and, especially, the itinerary of formation and of witness in this [Year of Faith](#). May the lamps you will carry in your chaplaincies always be fed by your faith that is humble but full

of reverence so that each one of you may be a light of hope and peace in the university environment. Amen.

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