



The Holy See

VISIT OF THE HOLY FATHER TO THE «STREET CLEANERS' CRIB »

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Thursday, 5 January 2006

*Mr Mayor, Mr President,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Friends,*

To find the right words, I had an Address prepared because to speak well at this moment is not so easy, even if the heart is full of joy. Therefore, allow me to read this Discourse, but I do so with all my heart.

Every year, as long as he could, the venerable Pontiff John Paul II came to admire this Crib of yours. Continuing this beautiful tradition, I have also gladly come here this evening, with great joy, to meet you and to visit the Crib you have also set up this year. I know that you were very eager for the Pope not to miss this traditional Christmas event, but I must tell you that I have likewise been looking forward to it.

Indeed, I wanted to thank you in person for the work you carry out, dear ecological workers, ensuring cleanliness and order in the vast area that surrounds St Peter's Square, which so many pilgrims and tourists visit.

And this cleanness and order are not only something external. They are the expression of a spirit, a mindset, which reveals inner beauty; the beauty which we pursue and which makes our city, the capital of the world in many senses, so hospitable.

Your service - the President mentioned the gestures of charity that you make, and these are very important - demands dedication and entails many sacrifices. I therefore thank you with all my heart! I greet you with affection and through you, I would like to greet all your colleagues.

I address a special thought to the Mayor of Rome and to the other Authorities, the directors, those in charge of the Azienda Municipale Ambiente (AMA) [Municipal Environmental Agency] and everyone who has wished to be present. My heartfelt thanks then go to those who have expressed your common sentiments.

One reason for our meeting is the visit to your Crib, the "Street-Cleaners' Crib", the best-known Crib in Rome, whose history dates back more than 30 years, since it was conceived and built for the first time for Christmas 1972 with the enthusiastic collaboration of many ecological workers. I know that it is enriched from year to year with new elements, but remains faithful to the style typical of the houses of Palestine in Jesus' time.

It is truly impressive, with 95 houses built entirely of tufa and equipped with doors and windows in the style of the period. It has plenty of rivers, streams, aqueducts, lights and streets paved with cobblestones.

In short, it is a vast rural scene peopled with about 200 figures, a tableau built with material from every part of the world and in particular, from St Peter's Colonnade, Bethlehem and *San Giovanni Rotondo*. I am impressed, and I congratulate all those who have toiled patiently to bring such a well-built project to completion.

The visit to the Crib, especially this evening on the eve of the Solemnity of the Epiphany, is like returning on a pilgrimage to Bethlehem, to the holy Grotto where the Redeemer was born, and to Jerusalem, where the Wise Men arrived from the East and met Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

The mystery of salvation

Pausing to contemplate this Gospel scene becomes an incentive to meditate upon the central mystery of our salvation: God became a man for our sake; we can welcome him into our hearts and feel the joy of his sanctifying presence.

It is not enough, however, to stop and look, we must do far more! Jesus must become the centre of our whole existence. Yes, it is important that he be the guide of our daily journey and the ultimate and definitive destination of our earthly pilgrimage.

As I express to you and your families my cordial good wishes for 2006 that has just begun, I would like to borrow St Augustine's beautiful sentence, which I chose for Christmas this year:

"*Expergiscere, homo: quia pro te Deus factus est homo* - Wake up, O man! For your sake God became man" (*Message Urbi et Orbi*, Christmas 2005, *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 4 January 2006, p. 1).

Dear friends, the Lord wants us to be vigilant and attentive without letting ourselves be duped by the false appeals of all that is fleeting and short-lived. May it be like this for all of you, dear friends,

and may the Lord grant you a serene and fruitful New Year.

I accompany this hope with the assurance of my prayers for you and for your loved ones, while I warmly bless you all.

Let us pray the "Our Father" together, and I will then impart my Blessing to you.

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