



The Holy See

OPENING OF THE HOLY DOOR AND MIDNIGHT MASS

BEGINNING OF THE ORDINARY JUBILEE

SOLEMNITY OF THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD

HOMILY OF THE HOLY FATHER FRANCIS

*Saint Peter's Basilica
Tuesday, 24 December 2024*

[Multimedia]

An angel of the Lord, bathed in light, illumines the night and brings glad tidings to the shepherds: “I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord” (*Lk 2:10-11*). Heaven breaks forth upon earth amid the wonder of the poor and the singing of angels. God has become one of us to make us like himself; he has come down to us to lift us up and restore us to the embrace of the Father.

Sisters and brothers, this is our hope. God is Emmanuel, God-with-us. The infinitely great has made himself tiny; divine light has shone amid the darkness of our world; the glory of heaven has appeared on earth. And how? As a little child. If God can visit us, even when our hearts seem like a lowly manger, we can truly say: Hope is not dead; hope is alive and it embraces our lives forever. Hope does not disappoint!

Brothers and sisters, with the opening of the Holy Door we have inaugurated a new Jubilee, and each of us can enter into the mystery of this extraordinary event. Tonight, the door of hope has opened wide to the world. Tonight, God speaks to each of us and says: there is hope also for you! There is hope for each of us. And do not forget, sisters and brothers, that God forgives everything, God always forgives. Do not forget this, which is a way of understanding hope in the Lord.

To receive this gift, we are called to set out with the marvel of the shepherds in the fields of Bethlehem. The Gospel tells us that, having heard the message of the angel, they “went with haste” (*Lk 2:16*). In this same way, “*with haste*”, we too are called to recover lost hope, to renew that hope in our hearts, and to sow seeds of hope amid the bleakness of our time and our world. And there is so much desolation at this time. We think of wars, of children being shot at, bombs on schools and hospitals. Do not delay, do not hesitate, but allow yourselves to be drawn along by the Good News.

With haste, then, let us set out to behold the Lord who is born for us, our hearts joyful and attentive, ready to meet him and then to bring hope to the way we live our daily lives. And this is our task: to bring hope into the different situations of life. For Christian hope is not a cinematic “happy ending” which we passively await, but rather, a promise, the Lord’s promise, to be welcomed here and now in our world of suffering and sighs. It is a summons not to tarry, to be kept back by our old habits, or to wallow in mediocrity or laziness. Hope calls us – as Saint Augustine would say – to be upset with things that are wrong and to find the courage to change them. Hope calls us to become pilgrims in search of truth, dreamers who never tire, women and men open to being challenged by God’s dream, which is of a new world where peace and justice reign.

Let us learn a lesson from the shepherds. The hope born this night does not tolerate the indifference of the complacent or the lethargy of those content with their own comforts – and so many of us are in danger of becoming too comfortable; hope does not accept the faux prudence of those who refuse to get involved for fear of making mistakes, or of those who think only of themselves. Hope is incompatible with the detachment of those who refuse to speak out against evil and the injustices perpetrated at the expense of the poor. Christian hope, on the other hand, while inviting us to wait patiently for the Kingdom to grow and spread, also requires of us, even now, to be bold, responsible, and not only that but also compassionate, in our anticipation of the fulfilment of the Lord’s promise. And here perhaps it will do us good to ask ourselves about compassion: do I have compassion? Am I able to suffer-with? Let us reflect on this.

On reflecting on how often we accommodate ourselves to the world and conform to its way of thinking, a fine priest and writer prayed for a Blessed Christmas in these words: “Lord, I ask you for a little annoyance, a touch of restlessness, a twinge of regret. At Christmas, I would like to find myself dissatisfied. Happy, but not satisfied. Happy because of what you do, dissatisfied by my lack of response. Please, take away our complacency and hide a few thorns beneath the hay of our all-too-full ‘manger’. Fill us with the desire for something greater” (A. Pronzato, *La novena di Natale*). The desire for something greater. Do not stand still. Let us not forget that still water is the first to become stagnant.

Christian hope is precisely this “something greater”, which should spur us to set out “with haste”. As disciples of the Lord, we are called to find our greater hope in him, and then, without delay,

carry that hope with us, as pilgrims of light amid the darkness of this world.

Sisters and brothers, this is the Jubilee. This is the season of hope in which we are invited to rediscover the joy of meeting the Lord. The Jubilee calls us to spiritual renewal and commits us to the transformation of our world, so that this year may truly become a time of jubilation. A jubilee for our mother Earth, disfigured by profiteering; a time of jubilee for the poorer countries burdened beneath unfair debts; a time of jubilee for all those who are in bondage to forms of slavery old and new.

All of us have received the gift and task of bringing hope wherever hope has been lost, lives broken, promises unkept, dreams shattered and hearts overwhelmed by adversity. We are called to bring hope to the weary who have no strength to carry on, the lonely oppressed by the bitterness of failure, and all those who are broken-hearted. To bring hope to the interminable, dreary days of prisoners, to the cold and dismal lodgings of the poor, and to all those places desecrated by war and violence. To bring hope there, to sow hope there.

The Jubilee has now opened so that all people may receive hope, the hope of the Gospel, the hope of love and hope of forgiveness.

As we contemplate the manger, as we gaze upon it and see God's tender love in the face of the Child Jesus, let us ask ourselves: "Are our hearts full of expectation? Does this hope find a place there? ... As we contemplate the loving kindness of God who overcomes our doubts and fears, let us also contemplate the grandeur of the hope that awaits us. ... May this vision of hope illumine our path each day" (C. M. Martini, *Christmas Homily*, 1980).

Dear sister, dear brother, on this night the "holy door" of God's heart lies open before you. Jesus, God-with-us, is born for you, for me, for us, for every man and woman. And remember that with him, joy flourishes; with him, life changes; with him, hope does not disappoint.