



The Holy See

POPE JOHN PAUL II

GENERAL AUDIENCE

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Time itself is now pervaded by eternity

1. In inviting us to commemorate 2,000 years of Christianity, the Jubilee takes us back to the event that inaugurates the Christian era: the birth of Jesus. Luke's Gospel tells us of this extraordinary event in simple and moving words: Mary "gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn" (2:7).

Jesus' birth makes visible the mystery of the Incarnation already realized in the Virgin's womb at the time of the Annunciation. In fact, she gives birth to the child that, as the docile and responsible instrument of the divine plan, she had conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit. Through the humanity assumed in Mary's womb, the eternal Son of God begins to live as a child, and grows "in wisdom and in stature, and in favour with God and man" (Lk 2:52). Thus he manifests himself as true man.

2. This truth is stressed by John in the Prologue of his Gospel, when he says: "*The Word became flesh and dwelt among us*" (1:14). By saying "became flesh", the Evangelist is alluding to his human nature not only in its mortal condition, but also in its entirety. The Son of God assumed all that is human, except sin. The Incarnation is the fruit of an immense love, which spurred God willingly to share our human condition to the full.

In becoming man, the Word of God brought about a fundamental change in the very condition of time. We can say that in Christ *human time was filled with eternity*.

This transformation touches the destiny of all humanity, since "by his Incarnation, he, the Son of God, has in a certain way united himself with each man" (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 22). He came to offer everyone participation in his divine life. The gift of this life includes sharing in his eternity. Jesus said so especially with regard to the Eucharist: "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life" (Jn 6:54). The effect of the Eucharistic banquet is that we already possess this life. Elsewhere Jesus indicated the same possibility with the symbol of the living water that could quench thirst, the living water of his Spirit given in view of eternal life (cf. Jn 4:14). The life of grace thus reveals a dimension of eternity that lifts up our earthly existence and directs it, with true continuity, to our entrance into heavenly life.

3. The communication of Christ's eternal life also means that we share in his attitude of filial love for the Father.

In eternity, "the Word was with God" (Jn 1:1), that is, in a perfect bond of communion with the Father. When he became flesh, this bond began to be expressed in all Jesus' human behaviour. On earth the Son lived in constant communion with the Father, in an attitude of perfect loving obedience.

The entry of eternity into time is the entrance, in Jesus' earthly life, of the eternal love that unites the Son to the Father. The Letter to the Hebrews alludes to this when it speaks of Christ's inner attitude at the very moment he enters the world: "Lo, I have come to do your will, O God" (10:7). The immense "leap" from the heavenly life of the Son of God into the abyss of human existence is motivated by his will to fulfil the Father's plan in total self-giving.

We are called to assume this same attitude, walking on the way opened by the Son of God made man, so that we can share his journey to the Father. The eternity that enters into us is a sovereign power of love that seeks to guide our whole life to its ultimate purpose, hidden in the mystery of the Father. Jesus himself indissolubly linked the two movements, descent and ascent, which define the Incarnation: "I came from the Father and have come into the world; again, I am leaving the world and going to the Father" (Jn 16:28).

Eternity has entered human life. Now human life is called to make the journey with Christ from time to eternity.

4. If in Christ time is raised to a higher level, receiving access to eternity, this implies that the approaching millennium must not be considered as merely the next step in the course of time, but as *a stage in humanity's journey towards its definitive destiny*.

The Year 2000 is not only the door to another millennium; it is the door to eternity that, in Christ, continues to open onto time to give it its true direction and authentic meaning.

It discloses to our mind and our heart a far broader perspective in which to consider the future. Time is often unappreciated. It seems to disappoint man with its precariousness, its rapid flow, which makes all things futile. But if eternity has entered time, then time itself must be recognized as rich in value. Its inexorable flow is not a journey towards nothingness, but a journey to eternity.

The real danger is not the passing of time, but using it badly, rejecting the eternal life offered by Christ. The desire for life and eternal happiness must be ceaselessly reawakened in the human heart. The celebration of the Jubilee is meant precisely to increase this desire, helping believers and the people of our time to open their hearts to an unbounded life.

To the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors the Holy Father said:

In particular I wish to greet the ecumenical group of Kristiansand in Norway. I extend a warm welcome to all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors. During this season of Advent, may peace and joy fill your hearts as you prepare to celebrate the birth of the Saviour. Upon you and your families, I cordially invoke abundant divine blessings.

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