



The Holy See

DEDICATION OF THE NEW SHRINE OF DIVINE LOVE (ROME)

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Sunday, 4 July 1999

1. *"This day is holy to our Lord"* (Neh 8:10). The words we heard in the first reading are well-suited to the occasion we are celebrating at this Shrine of Divine Love, so dear to the inhabitants of Rome and Lazio. Yes, this day is dedicated to God and is therefore a day particularly full of festivity and joy. The Lord has gathered us in his house to let us experience the gift of his presence more intensely. Like the Jewish people, we too, following what Nehemiah recounts, welcome his words with the acclamation "Amen, amen" and in our hearts prostrate before him, expressing our deep fidelity to his will.

We too repeat with the Responsorial Psalm: *"Your words, O Lord, are spirit and life!"*.

The Word of God illumines the rite of dedication for this new Marian shrine, where the faithful who will gather here in prayer, especially during the Great Jubilee, will be helped to open themselves to the renewing action of the Spirit.

In this place, therefore, everything must prepare us to encounter the Lord; everything must encourage believers to proclaim their faith in Christ yesterday, today and for ever.

2. *"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God"* (Mt 16:16).

This is the Apostle Peter's profession of faith which we heard in today's Gospel passage. Jesus answers Peter by entrusting him with the task of supporting the whole spiritual edifice of his Church: *"You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church"* (Mt 16:18).

The church we are in, and which is now consecrated for worship, is a sign of that other Church made of living stones, which are the believers in Christ wonderfully united by the spiritual "cement" of charity. Through the action of the Holy Spirit, the gifts and charisms of each member of the ecclesial community do not contradict, but indeed enrich the harmony of the one spiritual edifice of

the Body of Christ. In this way, the material church expresses the interior communion of all who gather here to be taught the Word of God, as was recalled in the first reading: "The ears of all the people were attentive to the book of the law" (Neh 8:3). Here the faithful will receive the sacraments, especially the sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist, and will be able to express their devotion to Our Lady of Divine Love with greater intensity.

3. "*The joy of the Lord is your strength*" (Neh 8:10).

In this way Nehemiah greeted the assembly of Israelites, who were gathered in one place to renew their covenant with God. Today I would like to greet all of you who are gathered in this Marian shrine with the same words.

I thank you, dear brothers and sisters, for coming here in great numbers. I affectionately greet the Cardinal Vicar, to whom I extend my gratitude for the sentiments he expressed to me at the beginning of the celebration. Together with him, I greet the Bishops, the priests and rectors of other Marian shrines who have come here. I greet the rector-parish priest of this shrine, Fr Pasquale Silla, who has done so much to reach this day, and all the sons and daughters of Our Lady of Divine Love who look after these places with great care. They are continuing the praiseworthy work of their founder, Fr Umberto Terenzi, who tenaciously wanted a new house here for the Blessed Virgin, the one we are dedicating today. I extend a special greeting to the parishioners of this parish-shrine, the direct witnesses to how the Roman people love Our Lady of Divine Love and come on pilgrimage to visit her often, trusting in her intercession.

Lastly, I greet those who planned and organized this work: Fr Costantino Ruggeri and the architect, Luigi Leoni, as well as all the benefactors, contractors and workers.

4. Today, the dedication of this new shrine partially fulfils the vow which the Roman people, at the request of Pope Pius XII, made to Our Lady of Divine Love in 1944, when the allied troops were about to launch their final attack on Rome, then occupied by the Germans. Before the image of Our Lady of Divine Love, the Romans prayed on 4 June of that year for the safety of their city, promising Mary that they would change their moral conduct, build the new Shrine of Divine Love and open a charitable institution in Castel di Leva. That same day, a little more than an hour after the vow had been read, the German army withdrew from Rome without offering any resistance, while the allies entered through Porta San Giovanni and Porta Maggiore and were welcomed with exultation by the Romans.

Today the shrine is a reality and the charitable institution is nearly finished: a home for the elderly not far from here. But the Roman people's vow included a promise to Blessed Mary that is unending and much more difficult to fulfil: the change in moral conduct, the constant effort, that is, to renew life and make it conform ever more closely to Christ's. Dear brothers and sisters, this is the task that the sacred building dedicated to God today recalls.

These walls surrounding the sacred space where we are gathered, and even more, the altar, the great multicoloured stained-glass windows and the other religious symbols, are meant as signs of God's presence among his people. A presence made real in the Eucharist, celebrated every day and kept in the tabernacle; a presence which shows itself living and life-giving through the administration of the sacraments; a presence which can be continually experienced in prayer and meditation. May this presence be a constant call to conversion and fraternal reconciliation for everyone!

5. *"Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb ... having the glory of God" (Rv 21:9-10).*

The great vision of the heavenly Jerusalem, which closes the Book of Revelation, invites us to raise our eyes from the beauty and architectural harmony of this new shrine to the splendour of the heavenly Church, the fullness of love and communion with the Blessed Trinity, towards which the whole history of salvation has been aiming since the beginning.

As the Second Vatican Council states, Mary is the image and first-fruits of the heavenly Jerusalem, towards which we are journeying. "The Mother of Jesus in the glory which she possesses in body and soul in heaven is the image and beginning of the Church as it is to be perfected in the world to come. Likewise she shines forth on earth, until the day of the Lord shall come, a sign of certain hope and comfort to the pilgrim People of God" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 68).

Let us turn our hearts confidently to Mary and invoke her motherly protection on everyone.

To you, Mother of Divine Love, we entrust the diocesan community, the continuation of the City Mission which ended just a few weeks ago, as well as this beloved city of Rome with its problems and resources, its worries and hopes.

To you we entrust families, the sick, the elderly and the lonely. In your hands we place the fruits of the Holy Year and, in a special way, the expectations and hopes of the young people who will come to Rome during the Jubilee for the 15th World Youth Day.

To you let us entrust the request I made to you earlier during my first visit to this shrine, that through your intercession the number of workers in the Lord's harvest will be increased, and that young people will appreciate the full beauty of the gift of being called to the priesthood and the religious life, which the world today so greatly needs.

Amen!

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