



The Holy See

PENTECOST VIGIL

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

*St. Peter's Square
Saturday, 22 May 1999*

1. "*Open the door to Christ your Saviour*": this invitation, which echoed loud and clear for three years in preparation for the Great Jubilee, has characterized our City Mission.

Let us thank God for this extraordinary event, which has been an act of love for the city and for each of its residents. In the Christian communities the City Mission has encouraged a journey of intense spirituality, nourished by prayer and by listening to the Word of God. It has also fostered the growth of that ecclesial communion which the Roman Synod indicated as an indispensable condition of the new evangelization.

The entire diocesan community, in its various ministries, vocations and charisms, has joined forces to make its own contribution of prayer, proclamation, witness and service. Together we have shared the experience of being the "People of God on mission".

I feel it my duty to thank those who in various ways took part in this important pastoral programme. First of all, His Eminence the Cardinal Vicar, who has zealously guided the Mission in close collaboration with the Auxiliary Bishops, whom I cordially greet. Here I would like to mention the other prelates who offered their appreciated cooperation, including the late Bishop Clemente Riva.

My thoughts turn gratefully to you, dear missionaries, priests, religious and especially lay people, who have been the first to benefit from the grace of the Mission. Your generous efforts in preparing yourselves and in bringing the Gospel to homes and to the other areas of the city have opened new ways of evangelization and Christian presence in the daily texture of our people's lives. The Holy Spirit has guided you step by step, inspired you with the right words for proclaiming Christ and supported you in the inevitable moments of difficulty.

Let us thank the Lord for all he has done, showing in every situation the signs of his mercy and love. The Great Jubilee, now close at hand, spurs us to continue this missionary effort with the same enthusiasm, so that the results achieved by the Mission can be consolidated and extended. In this way we will be able to show the face of our open and welcoming Church, renewed in faith and rich in works of charity, to the many pilgrims who will come to Rome next year.

2. For this to happen, our missionary work, so well begun, must be consolidated and developed. The individuals and families we have already visited in their homes and workplaces must be given ongoing support, and we must reach out to those who for various reasons could not be contacted in these years.

May the annual visit to families and the centres for listening to the Gospel, which must become more widespread, thus be the soul of parish ministry, thanks to the collaboration of ecclesial associations, movements and groups. May the celebration of the Word of God enhance the faith journey of parish communities, especially during the principal seasons of the liturgical year. May the sign of charity towards the poor and suffering accompany the proclamation of the Lord, showing his living presence through the daily witness of fraternal love.

We must strengthen communion among Christians who are involved in the fields of work and study, of care-giving and entertainment, where the Gospel has been preached in a practical way. The seed of Gospel newness, sown by the Mission, must grow and bear fruit everywhere, even where it has not been possible yet to organize suitable missionary programmes. For this reason our witness is more urgent than ever. No situation, in fact, is impervious to the Gospel; on the contrary, the risen Christ is already mysteriously present there through his Holy Spirit.

3. Such an extensive missionary outreach calls for a programme of formation and catechesis directed to all the People of God, to make them more vividly aware of their missionary vocation and to prepare them to give an account of their faith in Christ always and everywhere.

It is the task of parishes, religious communities, associations, movements and groups to provide this formation by offering journeys of faith, prayer and Christian experience filled with theological, spiritual and cultural substance.

Dear priests, this task is entrusted first of all to you: be wise leaders and diligent teachers of faith in your communities.

Dear men and women religious, you have contributed so much to the Mission: continue to support it with your prayer, your holiness of life and your own charisms in the varied apostolic fields in which you are involved.

Dear lay people, you are called to undertake a great, permanent missionary movement in the city

and in every area of its life. In families, in the vast, complex world of work and culture, in the schools and universities, in health care, the mass media and leisure activities, do not fail to make your contribution so that the Gospel message can have an impact on all society.

And could we forget the contribution to the City Mission that the sick have made and are called to renew by the offering of their own suffering, and cloistered religious by their constant prayer?

My gratitude goes to each and every one for their very useful spiritual help.

4. As we look at these three years of the City Mission, it is easy to see that the Word of God has been widely sown. If this divine seed is not to be wasted but is to sink deep roots and bear fruit in daily life and pastoral ministry, a specific reflection must be fostered which will involve all sectors of the Church and result in a special convention. I am thinking of a great meeting which will serve to trace out, on the basis of the City Mission experience, the broad outline of a permanent commitment to evangelization and missionary activity.

To be the Church on mission: this is the great challenge in the years ahead for Rome and for the whole world. I entrust this task to you, dear priests, religious, lay people and, in a special way, to you, the movements and new communities, as I recall the meeting we had a year ago, on the Vigil of Pentecost, in this square. We must docilely open ourselves to the Spirit's action, accepting with gratitude and obedience the gifts he continually bestows for the benefit of the entire Church. This evening Christ says again to each of you: "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation" (Mk 16:15).

Dear friends, the Gospel that Christ has entrusted to us is the Gospel of peace! How could we keep it just for ourselves, especially at a time when oppression and warfare are sowing destruction and death in the neighbouring region of the Balkans? The Spirit prompts us to proclaim and work for peace in justice and reconciliation. With this in mind, I would like the Church in Rome to raise a unanimous prayer for peace on the forthcoming feast of *Corpus Christi*. Therefore, I invite you all - clergy, religious and faithful - to join me on Thursday evening, 3 June, at St John Lateran to participate in the Mass and procession for *Corpus Christi*, in which we will together implore the gift of peace in the Balkans. May the feast of the Holy Body and Blood of Christ be marked this year by intense prayer for peace.

5. *Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love.*

Come, Holy Spirit! The invocation which echoes in the liturgy of this Pentecost Vigil fills us with joy and hope.

Holy Spirit, author and soul of the Mission, raise up in the Church of Rome many missionaries among young people, adults and families, and instil in all of them the inextinguishable fire of your

love.

Spirit, "Light of hearts", point out the new ways for the City and Universal Mission in the third millennium which is about to begin. You, "of comforters the best", sustain the discouraged, confirm the enthusiasm of those who have experienced the joy of evangelization, strengthen in all the faithful the desire and courage to be a Gospel missionary each day where they live and work.

You, "the soul's most welcome guest", open the hearts of every person, family, religious and parish community, so that they will generously welcome poor pilgrims who will be participating in the Jubilee events. This will really be one of the most beautiful fruits of the City Mission: the concrete expression of that Roman charity, the fruit of faith, which has always accompanied the celebration of Holy Years.

Mary Most Holy, since Pentecost you have kept watch with the Church as she prays for the Holy Spirit: remain with us at the centre of our extraordinary Upper Room. To you, whom we venerate as *Our Lady of Divine Love*, we entrust the fruits of the City Mission, so that through your intercession the Diocese of Rome may offer the world a convinced witness to Christ our Saviour.

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