



The Holy See

JUBILEE OF THE DIOCESE OF ROME

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Sunday, 28 May 2000

1. *"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love"* (Jn 15: 9). Christ, on the eve of his death, opens his heart to the disciples gathered in the Upper Room. He leaves them his spiritual testament. In the Easter season the Church constantly returns in spirit to the Upper Room, to listen again with reverence to the Lord's words and to draw light and strength from them for her journey on the paths of the world.

Today *our Church of Rome*, which is celebrating her Jubilee, returns with trembling heart to the Upper Room. She returns there to be summoned by the divine Master, to meditate on his words and to discover *the most fitting response* to what he asks of her.

The words that our Church hears today on her Lord's lips are *strong and clear*: "Abide in my love!... This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (Jn 15: 9, 12). How could we not feel that Jesus' words are meant particularly for us? Does the Church of Rome not have the specific task of "presiding in charity" over the entire Christian world (cf. St Ignatius, *Ad Rom.*, Pref.)? Yes, the commandment of love involves our Church of Rome with special force and urgency.

And *love is demanding*. Christ says: "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (Jn 15: 13). Love will lead Jesus to the cross. Every disciple must remember this. Love comes from the Upper Room and leads back to the Upper Room. In fact, after the Resurrection it will be in the Upper Room again that the Apostles will think back to the words Jesus spoke on Holy Thursday and will become aware of their salvific meaning. By accepting and reciprocating Christ's love, from now on they are his friends: "No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I

have heard from my Father I have made known to you" (*Jn 15: 15*).

Gathered in the Upper Room after the divine Master's Resurrection and Ascension into heaven, the Apostles will fully understand the meaning of his words: "I appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide" (*Jn 15: 16*). By the action of the Holy Spirit these words will make them the saving community which is the Church. The Apostles will understand that they have been chosen for a special mission, to bear witness to love: "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love".

Today this message is passed on to us: as Christians we are called to be witnesses to love. This is the "fruit" which we are called to bear, and it is this fruit which "abides" in time and in eternity!

2. The second reading from the *Acts of the Apostles* speaks of the apostolic mission which flows from this love. Peter, sent for by the Roman centurion Cornelius, goes to him in Caesarea and helps him with his conversion, the conversion of a pagan. The Apostle himself comments on that very important event: "Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation any one who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him" (*Acts 10: 34-35*). When the Holy Spirit later descends on that group of believers of pagan origin, Peter comments: "Can any one forbid water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" (*Acts 10: 47*). Enlightened from on high, Peter understands and testifies that *all are called by Christ's love*.

Here we are at a decisive turning-point in the Church's life: *a turning-point to which the Book of Acts attaches great importance*. The Apostles, and Peter in particular, had not yet clearly perceived that their mission was not limited to the children of Israel. What happened in Cornelius' house convinced them that this was not the case. From that time on, Christianity began to grow outside Israel and an ever deeper awareness of the Church's universality started to take hold: *every man and every woman is called*, without distinction of race or culture, to receive the Gospel. Christ's love is for everyone and the Christian is a witness to this divine and universal love.

3. Firmly convinced of this truth, Peter went first to Antioch and finally to Rome. *The Church of Rome owes its origins to him*. Today's meeting of the Ecclesial Community of Rome, in the heart of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, rekindles in all of us the memory of these apostolic origins, the memory of Peter, the first Pastor of our city. Numerous pilgrims from every part of the world are coming to his tomb in these months to celebrate the Jubilee of the Incarnation of the Lord and to profess the same faith as Peter's in Christ, Son of the Living God.

Once again this shows the particular vocation which divine Providence has reserved for Rome: to be a reference-point for the communion and unity of the whole Church and for the spiritual renewal of all humanity.

4. Dear faithful of the beloved Church of Rome, I am pleased to extend my affectionate greeting to

you on this occasion which brings us together to celebrate our Diocesan Jubilee. I greet the Cardinal Vicar, the Vicegerent and the Auxiliary Bishops, the priests and deacons, the men and women religious and all of you, lay people actively involved in parishes, movements, groups and the various milieus of the city's work and life. I also greet the mayor and the authorities present.

This day is *the symbolic peak of an intense preparatory journey*. From the Diocesan Synod to the City Mission, our Church of Rome, through her various members, has shown great pastoral vitality and ardent evangelizing zeal in these years. Today we want to thank the Lord for this. Through appropriate pastoral initiatives, the entire city was able to hear the Gospel message again in homes and workplaces. In this way it became clear how much the Church has been woven into the fabric of the people, and how close she is to the poorest and most marginalized.

At the end of the City Mission, on the evening of the Vigil of Pentecost last year, I told you: we must not squander the fruits of this season richly blessed with the Lord's gifts. This is why today's meeting *is, yes, the point of arrival*, but also an *indispensable starting-point*. From now on, there must be a general effort to make the "spirit of the City Mission" penetrate more and more deeply into the ordinary, everyday pastoral life of parishes and ecclesial realities. Everyone must consider this an "ongoing commitment" and the entire People of God must be involved, starting with the "missionaries", the priests, religious and lay persons who have experienced first-hand the beauty and joy of evangelization. Precisely because of this necessary renewal of the city's families and milieus, it is most appropriate that in the coming pastoral year we should undertake an attentive discernment of our journey thus far.

5. Let us thank God for all that the Diocese is experiencing; let us thank him above all for the events which are being celebrated at various times in this Jubilee Year. We are now on the eve of great, demanding events which require the broadest and most generous collaboration. I am thinking first of the *International Eucharistic Congress*, the "heart of the Jubilee", which celebrates the living presence among us and for us of the Word made flesh, "bread of life for the world".

Then there is the 15th *World Youth Day*. This will see a multitude of young people coming to Rome in August from every part of the world; they expect to be welcomed with joy and friendliness by their Roman peers and to receive hospitality from families and from the entire Christian and civil community.

In addition, in the month of October we will celebrate the *Jubilee of Families*, which will require special care on the part of the Diocese and of Christian families. Let us prepare for these events with heartfelt concern.

6. Church of Rome, know how extraordinary your mission also is in relation to the Jubilee! Do not be discouraged by the difficulties you meet on your daily path. You will be sustained by the witness of the Apostles Peter and Paul, who consecrated your beginnings with their blood; may

you be encouraged by the examples of the saints and martyrs who have given you the torch of unswerving dedication to the Gospel. Be not afraid! Through your children's efforts may Christ's love reach all the city's inhabitants; may it spread to every milieu, to bring joy and hope everywhere.

And you, Mary, *Salus populi Romani*, Our Lady of Divine Love, help us. We entrust ourselves to you with confidence. Through your motherly intercession, may the Church of Rome receive a new descent of the Holy Spirit, the principle of her unity and the strength for her mission.

Praised be Jesus Christ!

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