



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II
TO JUBILEE PILGRIMS GATHERED
IN SAINT PETER'S SQUARE***

Saturday, 18 March 2000

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. I cordially greet each of you who have come to Rome from various parts of Italy and the world to celebrate the Holy Year. Many pilgrims from the Diocese of Vicenza, accompanied by dear Bishop Pietro Nonis, are here in the square. I offer you my affectionate greeting, which I extend to all the faithful of the Church of Vicenza, so lively and active, as her numerous saints attest. It is precisely in the saints that we are given an extraordinarily eloquent model of that fidelity to the Gospel in daily life which is the primary objective of the Great Jubilee. May you be spurred to emulate the example of these witnesses to the faith, of whom your Church is justly proud.

I know the problems you have to face: the considerable decrease in priestly and religious vocations, the growing fragility of many marital bonds, secularization that undermines the religious dimension of life, decreased attendance at Sunday Mass when families and communities gather round the Eucharist. Your community has taken up these challenges and intends to face them by relying on divine help and on the collaboration of all its members.

Dear friends, I encourage you in this commitment and assure you of my constant support in prayer. Be firm and faithful to Christ and his Gospel; be generous and open to your brothers and sisters.

2. I also extend a cordial welcome to Archbishop Felice Cece and the pilgrims from the Archdiocese of Sorrento-Castellammare di Stabia who have wanted to meet the Successor of Peter during the Jubilee celebration. Dear friends, the providential period of the Holy Year and the Lenten season we are observing invites everyone to make himself the docile instrument of the

Lord's grace. He alone brings salvation and complete renewal to the humble in spirit and to those who are open to the truth. God takes the first step towards human beings; they are asked, however, to welcome him through a persevering commitment to conversion.

Dear friends, may you respond to the Lord's invitation. Renew your fidelity to Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life. During this Jubilee pilgrimage you have been able to have a deeper encounter with him. Let his word enlighten you, his love transform you, and bring his joy and peace to everyone you meet on your return.

3. I now address you, dear members of the Italian Women's Centre! Today's event, which has brought you here, is one of the central moments of the national Jubilee which your association is celebrating in these days. Welcome!

The theme you have chosen for your meeting, "*Starting from the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000: Women Rediscovering Faith*", fits in well with the goals of the Holy Year. Indeed, your social and political commitment is motivated by the interior journey of faith, which enables you to look at reality with the penetrating eyes of Gospel wisdom. Live your vocation with courage like Mary of Nazareth, the New Woman and fruitful witness to God's goodness.

May you be encouraged by the example and intercession of the many holy women who throughout human history have made a decisive contribution to the Church's life and to building the civilization of love.

4. I would now like to express my goodwill and affection to those taking part in the Forum of Christian organizations for the pastoral care of circus and amusement park workers. I hope, dear friends, that you will bear witness everywhere to the virtues that characterize your lifestyle: patience, courage, calculated risk, close collaboration and mutual respect.

5. It is a great joy to greet the Pastors and faithful of the *Syro-Malabar Church* from India and other parts of the world who have come to Rome for their Jubilee celebration.

You are the spiritual heirs of the Apostle Thomas and this Holy Year offers you a unique opportunity to be strengthened and renewed in the apostolic witness on which your faith is founded.

Through prayer and repentance, devotion and conversion, may the manifold graces which God showers upon his Church during this "year of favour" (cf. *Lk 4: 19*) bear ever more abundant fruits of holiness in your lives.

Tomorrow, according to your liturgical calendar, is the Third Sunday of the Great Fast. The discipline of fasting is a familiar exercise to you and a practice much revered by the peoples and

religions of India. I pray that the spiritual benefits of this period of fasting, and of this special season of preparation for the celebration of the Lord's Resurrection, will enrich your Church and strengthen you in the role which the Syro-Malabar community is called to play in the new evangelization.

Commending Your Grace, Major Archbishop Varkey Vithayathil, and all of you to the loving protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary and to the powerful intercession of your own patrons, St Thomas the Apostle and the saints of your Church, I invoke upon you and your communities at home the grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

6. It is a great pleasure for me to welcome His Beatitude the Patriarch and the faithful of the *Chaldean Catholic Church* who have come to Rome from various parts of the world, especially Iraq, to celebrate the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000.

The richness of your spiritual tradition, which traces its origins to the preaching of the Apostles Thomas and Thaddeus, has strengthened many holy men and women as they shed their blood for Christ. Fidelity to this same heritage prompts your ecumenical outreach today to your brethren of the Assyrian Church of the East.

The sons and daughters of the Church in Iraq, and all the Iraqi people who are being so severely tried by the continuing international embargo, never cease to be present in my thoughts. I assure all those who are suffering, especially the women, children and elderly, of my prayerful support. May Jesus, true friend of the poor and the afflicted, ever accompany them in their difficulties and sustain them with his love.

Entrusting Your Beatitude Patriarch Raphael I Bidawid and all the faithful of the Chaldean Catholic Church to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, I cordially invoke upon you every grace and blessing in our Lord Jesus Christ.

7. I extend a warm welcome to the theology students of the Borromeo College in Münster, accompanied by Bishop Reinhard Lettmann. In this Holy Year you are making a pilgrimage to the Eternal City. As a young theologian, I too studied in Rome. During that stay I was formed not only by my studies but also by the holy places in this city: the tombs of the Princes of the Apostles, the ground soaked by the blood of martyrs, the seven basilicas in which faith became stone, and especially the See of Peter's Successor. During these days I ask you to study Rome! In this city learn what the universal Church is! Take this knowledge back to your homeland! May passing through the Holy Door strengthen your determination to dedicate your youth to Christ, who is the door to life. I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing to you all.

8. I warmly greet the pilgrims from Poland at this audience: Bishops Ryszard Karpinski and Henryk Tomasik of Siedlce, the parish and school groups, and the choir from Bielsko-Biala. In a

special way I greet the craftsmen from all of Poland and the representatives of the Solidarity trade union from various regions.

You have come to Rome to celebrate your feast on St Joseph's day during the Great Jubilee of the Redemption. Following St Joseph's example, try to make your daily workplace a place for meeting Christ. May the Carpenter of Nazareth go with you and protect you in your work, so that you and your families can enjoy its abundant fruits.

God bless you!

9. I cordially bless everyone here, particularly the sick, the disabled, people in difficulty and the elderly. I assure you all of a remembrance in my prayer.

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