



The Holy See

**CHRISTMAS ADDRESS OF
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE ROMAN CURIA**

Tuesday, 21 December 2004

*Your Eminences,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Dear Brothers,*

1. Every year, the approach of the festive Christmas celebrations stirs feelings of serenity and peace. The birth of Jesus is an event that moves our hearts. The eternal Word became flesh and came to dwell among us (cf. Jn 1: 14). In the next few days, the Liturgy will remind us more than once of this fundamental truth of our faith: "*Christus natus est nobis, venite, adoremus*", (Christ is born for us, come, let us adore him).

2. Today's Meeting of the Successor of Peter with his collaborators in the Roman Curia is already taking place in this Christmas atmosphere. Dear and Venerable Brothers, thank you for coming and thank you for the affection with which you surround me. The passing years make us feel ever more keenly the need for divine and human help. Thank you for your constant "harmony" as you work with me in the service of the universal Church, each one of you carrying out the task entrusted to him.

I address a special thought of gratitude to the Cardinal Dean for interpreting your common sentiments and for offering me your fervent good wishes for a Holy Christmas and for the New Year; I cordially reciprocate with my own good wishes for each one of you and for your loved ones.

3. The divine Child whom we adore in the crib is the Emmanuel, God-with-us, who is *really present in the sacrament of the Altar*. The wonderful exchange, the "*mirabile commercium*", that takes place in Bethlehem between God and humanity becomes constantly present in the sacrament of

the Eucharist, which for this reason is the source of the Church's life and holiness.

Before such a great gift and mystery we are left speechless! "*Adoro te devote*", we will say at Christmas, already making out in the shadows of a grotto the drama of the Cross and the shining triumph of Christ's Pasch.

4. From the Son of God made man, *Lumen gentium* (the Light of humanity), the Church received the lofty mission of being "a sign and instrument... of communion with God and of unity among all men" (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 1). Dear brothers, let us be ever more aware that *communion with God* and *unity among all people*, starting with believers, is our priority commitment.

"*Ut unum sint!*". Was not this the heartfelt prayer that Christ addressed to the Father on the eve of his redeeming passion? It is urgently necessary to rebuild full communion among Christians. One of the aims of celebrating the *Year of the Eucharist* is to increase this thirst for unity by indicating the one, inexhaustible source: Christ himself. We must journey on unwavering towards unity to which, providentially, the Second Ecumenical Vatican Council gave a strong impetus. Indeed, it was precisely *40 years ago*, on 21 November 1964, that the Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* and the Decrees *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* on the Eastern Catholic Churches and *Unitatis Redintegratio* on ecumenism were promulgated.

5. Let us give thanks to God because at various levels *the ecumenical endeavour* is gathering momentum, thanks to constant contacts, meetings and initiatives with our brethren of the different Orthodox and Protestant Churches and Ecclesial Communities. In this context, *the visits* from some of their distinguished representatives *which I have received this year* acquire exceptional significance.

I remember among others the *visit of the Ecumenical Delegation from Finland*, and especially *that of the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I* for the Solemnity of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul in June, and a little less than a month ago, for the consignment of the gift of the relics of Sts Gregory Nazi-anzen and John Chrysostom. I warmly hope that *the return to Russia of the icon of the Mother of God of Kazan* will also contribute to hastening the unity of all Christ's disciples.

6. *The unity of the Church* and the *unity of the human race!* It sometimes happens that I read the aspiration to this unity on the faces of *pilgrims of all ages*. I detected it in particular at the *meeting with the young people of Switzerland* in Bern and at the Italian Catholic Action meeting in *Loreto*. Who but Christ can appease this hunger for life in communion?

Believers have an immense responsibility, especially to the new generations to whom they must pass on the Christian patrimony intact. Therefore, on many occasions, especially during my *pilgrimage to Lourdes*, I did not fail to encourage European Catholics to stay faithful to Christ. Indeed, it is in *the heart* that are nourished those Christian roots of Europe on which a future of

solidarity and justice on the Continent and throughout the world largely depends. I would like to repeat here what I emphasized in my *Message* for the forthcoming World Day of Peace: "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good".

7. *Adoro te devote!* Dear and Venerable Brothers, in gathering together the expectations and hopes of the Church and of humanity, let us turn our gaze once more to Christmas, now at hand. Our hearts have no fear in the face of difficulties because we *trust in you, Child of Bethlehem*, who out of love came to dwell among us. Make yourself recognized and welcomed everywhere as the Prince of Peace and the Redeemer of man!

With affection, I impart my Blessing to you all.

Happy Christmas!