



# The Holy See

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PASTORAL VISIT TO THE ROMAN PARISH OF SAINT FRANCIS XAVIER

*HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II*

*Sunday, 3 December 1978*

1. I am here today to visit your parish dedicated to St Francis Xavier; I do so with great emotion and deep joy. This is my first visit to a parish in the diocese of Rome, entrusted to me by Christ through my election as Bishop of Rome, which took place on 16 October as a result of the votes of the Cardinals, gathered in conclave. Taking possession of the Basilica of St John Lateran, the cathedral of the Bishop of this City, I said that, in a certain way, I was then entering all the parishes of the diocese of Rome. Of course this entrance into the parishes of Rome, during the ceremonies at the Lateran on twelve November, was rather in spirit. The actual visits to the Roman parishes, on the contrary, must take place gradually. I hope that everyone will understand this and be indulgent with me, in consideration of the immense mass of commitments connected with my ministry.

It is a great joy for me to be able to visit as the first Roman parish precisely yours, to which I am linked by a special memory. In fact, in the years of the immediate post-war period, as a student in Rome, I used to go nearly every Sunday to Garbatella, to help in the pastoral service. Some moments of that period are still alive in my memory, although it seems to me that in the course of over thirty years many things have changed enormously here.

2. All Rome has changed. Then there were few suburbs. Today we find ourselves in the centre of a large inhabited district. Now buildings occupy all the green spaces surrounding the city. These buildings speak of the people who inhabit them. You, beloved parishioners, are these inhabitants. You make up the citizens of Rome and, at the same time, a definite community of the People of God. The parish is just such a community. It is so, and becomes ever more so by means of the Gospel, the Word of God, which is proclaimed here regularly and also because of the fact that sacramental life is lived here. Coming to you today, in the name of Christ, I am thinking particularly

of what Christ himself transmits to you by means of his priests, your pastors. But not only by means of them. I am thinking of how much Christ operates by means of all of you.

3. To whom does my thought go particularly and whom do I address? I address all the families who live in this parish community and who make up a part of the Church of Rome. To visit the parishes, as part of the Diocese-Church, it is necessary to reach all the "domestic churches", that is, all the families. This, in fact, was the name given to families by the Fathers of the Church. "Make your home a church", St John Chrysostom urged his faithful in one of his sermons. And the following day he repeated: "When I said to you yesterday: make your home a church, you burst into acclamations of jubilee and showed eloquently what joy had flooded your hearts on hearing those words" (In Genesim Serm. VI, 2; VII, 1: *PG* 54, 607 f.; cf. also *Lumen Gentium*, 11; *Apostolicam actuositatem*, 11). Therefore, finding myself among you here today, before this altar, as Bishop of Rome, I go in spirit to all the families. Many are certainly present here: to them I address my cordial greeting; but, with my thought and my heart, I seek them all.

I say to all married couples and to parents, young and adult: take each other's hand as you did on your wedding day, on receiving the Sacrament of Marriage joyfully. Imagine your Bishop asking you again today for your consent and yourselves uttering, as then, the words of the marriage promise, the oath of your marriage.

Do you know why I recall it? Because the "domestic church", the quality and holiness of the family, the education of your children, depend on the observance of these commitments. Christ entrusted all that to you, beloved spouses, on the day in which he united your lives for ever, by means of the priest's ministry, at the moment in which you uttered the words that you must never forget: "until death do us part". If you remember them, if you observe them, beloved Brothers and Sisters, you are also apostles of Christ and you contribute to the work of Salvation (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 35, 41; *Gaudium et Spes*, 52).

4. Now my thought also goes to you, children, to you, young people. The Pope has a special predilection for you because not only do you represent but you are the future of the Church and therefore the future of your parish. Be profoundly friends of Jesus and take to your family, to the school, to the district, the example of your Christian life, limpid and joyful. Always be young Christians, real witnesses to Christ's teaching. Be, in fact, bearers of Christ to this confused society, which needs him more than ever today. Proclaim to everyone with your lives that only Christ is the true salvation of mankind.

5. And I address further, on this visit, the sick, the suffering, persons who are lonely, forsaken, who need understanding, a smile, help, the solidarity of brothers. At this moment my thought also goes to all those—patients, doctors, personnel, chaplains, Sisters—in the large hospital within your parish, the Orthopedic Accident Centre. To all, my affectionate encouragement and the assurance of my prayers.

6. Now that we have embraced all your Community with our thought and our heart, I wish to turn to those who have given themselves to Christ, in a particular way.

I wish to express a fatherly appreciation to the Sisters who live, pray and work in this populous parish: the Daughters of Charity of St Vincent of Paul, dedicated to care for children and the poor; the Handmaids of the Sanctuary, dedicated to the apostolate in the school; the Sister Disciples of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist, who unite commitment for the education of children with ceaseless worship of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist; the Capuchin Poor Clares, who, for four hundred years, in silence and in poverty, have been praying and offering themselves for the Church and for the world.

Thank you, thank you, beloved Sisters! May your Bridegroom Jesus reward you for the good you are doing! Continue to serve the Lord "in joy", with generous and intense constancy.

7. I address my last words to you, beloved Brother Priests, to you, beloved Parish Priest, and to all your collaborators. I have already had the opportunity to meet you separately and to reflect together on various questions concerning your parish. I thank you heartily for your collaboration with me, with the Cardinal Vicar of Rome, with the Auxiliary Bishop of your sector. By means of your ministry Christ himself comes and lives in this community, teaches, sanctifies, absolves and, above all, makes a gift of everyone and everything to the Father, as the third Eucharistic Prayer says. Do not tire of the holy ministry, do not tire of work for your Master. May the voice of Advent, which rings out so clearly in the Gospel words: "Keep watch!", reach everyone through you.

8. Your Parish is celebrating today the feast of its Patron Saint: St Francis Xavier, the apostle of the Far East, missionary and patron saint of the missions. How greatly he merited for this reason alone: to bring the coming of Christ to the hearts of those who did not know him, those whom his Gospel had not yet reached! Your parish intends to follow its Patron Saint, and today celebrates its mission day.

May the word of God be able to reach the utmost limits of the earth! May it be able to find its way to every human heart!

This is the prayer I raise, together with you, through the intercession of St Francis Xavier, I, your Bishop: Come, Lord Jesus, *Maranatha!* Amen

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