



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II  
TO THE CARDINALS, PAPAL HOUSEHOLD  
AND ROMAN CURIA**

*Saturday, 21 December 2002*

*Your Eminences,  
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,  
Men and Women Religious and Lay People of the Roman Curia,*

1. *Cum Maria contemplemur Christi vultum* (With Mary let us contemplate the face of Christ)! The meeting which gathers us today in accordance with a beautiful custom has a marked family atmosphere. We want to exchange good wishes in the imminence of Holy Night, on which we will pause to contemplate the face of Christ with Mary. I thank Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, the new Dean of the College of Cardinals, for the thoughts and sentiments he has expressed with noble words on behalf of you all. On this occasion, I would also like to extend an affectionate greeting and good wishes to the Dean emeritus, Cardinal Bernardin Gantin, and to express deep gratitude to him for all his work at the service of this Apostolic See.

This is a particularly important Christmas for me, because it falls in the *25th year of my Pontificate*. This particular circumstance impels me to share with you my "gratitude" to the Lord for the gifts he has lavished upon me in this long period spent at the service of the universal Church.

I would also like to say a very cordial "thank you" to you who are especially close to me, day after day, with your competent and affectionate collaboration. Without you, my ministry could not be satisfactorily carried out. I ask the Lord to reward you for this service to the Successor of Peter and to enable you to derive deep joy and spiritual comfort from it.

2. The *Year of the Rosary* in which our meeting takes place makes it special. This year aims to revive in the Christian community a prayer that is more effective than ever, also in the light of the

theological and spiritual directives outlined by the Second Vatican Council. Indeed, it is *a Marian prayer with a distinctly Christological heart*.

On this occasion, in reviewing, as is our custom, the *principal events* that have marked my ministry in recent months, I would like to do so in the perspective which the Rosary suggests: *with a contemplative gaze* that brings to the fore the sign of Christ's presence in the events themselves. In this sense, in the Apostolic Letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, I underlined the *anthropological significance* of this prayer (cf. n. 25); by training us to contemplate Christ, it guides us to see humanity and history in the light of his Gospel.

3. How can we forget, first of all, that the face of Christ continues to have a truly passionate, *sorrowful expression* because of *the conflicts that are bathing so many regions of the world in blood*, or threatening to break out with new virulence? The situation of the *Holy Land* continues to be emblematic, but other "forgotten" wars are equally devastating. Then terrorism continues to reap victims and to widen breaches.

In the face of this panorama streaked with blood, the Church does not cease to make her voice heard and, above all, she continues to raise her prayer. This is what she did in particular last 24 January on the *World Day of Prayer for Peace* in Assisi, when with representatives of the other religions, we witnessed to the mission of peace which is a special duty for all who believe in God. We must continue to cry out loudly: *"religions are at the service of peace"* (*Address*, n. 3, Assisi, 24 January 2002; *ORE*, 30 January 2002, p. 6).

I also reaffirmed this truth in my *Message for Peace* for the coming 1 January, commemorating *Pacem in terris*, the great Encyclical of Bl. John XXIII, who, on 11 April 1963 - almost 40 years have passed since then! - raised his voice at a difficult time in history to point out truth, justice, love and freedom as the "pillars" of true peace.

4. The face of Christ! If we look around us with a contemplative gaze, it will not be difficult to discern a ray of his splendour *in the beauties of creation*. But we will be forced at the same time to regret *the devastation that human carelessness can cause the environment*, every day inflicting wounds on nature that turn against man himself. I am therefore glad that I have been able to witness this year too, on various occasions, to the *Church's commitment in the context of ecology*.

Moreover, in this regard, doubly significant, since it is a result of collaboration between the Churches, *is the Declaration* that I signed on 10 June with His Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch *Bartholomew I* who was in Venice, by means of a special video link. We told the world that everyone must have *a new "ecological awareness"* for the future of humanity and with special concern for children, as an expression of responsibility towards self, towards others and towards creation.

5. Let us then look at all I have been granted to do with regard to *relations with the States*. I have reminded everyone of the urgent need to make *the dignity of the human person* and the *service of the common good* the focus of national and international policies. It is to announce this that the Church participates, in her own capacity, in international organizations. This is the reason for the agreements she stipulates, with a view not only to the expectations of believers but also to the good of all citizens.

In the [address I gave to the Parliament of the Italian Republic](#) on 14 November last, I underlined that the great challenge of a democratic State is its ability to found itself on the principle of the recognition of the inalienable rights of man, and on the generous, solidary cooperation of all in building the common good of the nation.

It is only right to recall that my Venerable Predecessor, Pius XII referred to these values 60 years ago, in his *Radio Message of 24 December 1942*. Mentioning with deep feeling "the stream of tears and sorrows" and the "accumulation of suffering and torment" that derive from the "devastating, terrible conflict" (AAS, 35 [1943], 24), the great Pontiff clearly outlined the universal and indispensable principles according to which, once the "dreadful catastrophe" of the war (AAS, *loc. cit.*, p. 18) was over, it would be necessary to build the "new national and international order so ardently desired by all peoples" (AAS, *loc. cit.*, p. 10). The years that have passed since then have only confirmed the farsighted wisdom of those lessons. How can we fail to hope that hearts, especially the hearts of the young, will open to accept these values in order to build a future of true and lasting peace?

6. Speaking of the young, our thoughts turn to the unforgettable experiences of *World Youth Day*, celebrated in July in Toronto. A meeting with young people is always an involving, and I would say "regenerating" event. This year the theme reminded them of their *missionary commitment* on the basis of Christ's mandate: to be the "light of the world" and "salt of the earth". It is wonderful to see that once again the young people did not let us down. Despite difficulties, vast numbers came to take part.

The presence of so many young people at the meeting with the Gospel and with the Pope should certainly not make us forget all the others who remain on the fringes or have fallen away, allured by other messages or confused by a thousand contradictory suggestions. It is up to the young people to become the evangelizers of their peers. If pastoral care can involve them, young people will not disappoint the Church, because *the Gospel is "young"* and can speak to the hearts of the young.

7. I then recall, with especially heartfelt gratitude to the Lord, the headway that *the ecumenical process* has made this year too. In fact there have also been plenty of reasons for dismay.

However, we must look at the light parts rather than at the shadows. Among the light patches, in

addition to the Declaration signed with Patriarch Bartholomew I, already mentioned, I would like above all to recall the meeting with the *Delegation of the Orthodox Church of Greece*, which came to visit me on 11 March, bringing a message from His Beatitude Christodoulos, Archbishop of Athens and All Greece. Thus I was able to relive, in a certain way, the atmosphere I experienced last year during my visit to Greece in the footsteps of the Apostle Paul. Although some causes for distance still remain, this attitude of reciprocal openness is certainly a ray of hope.

The same should be said with regard to the visit paid to me by *the Orthodox Patriarch Teoctist of Romania* with whom I signed a [Common Declaration](#) last October. When will the Lord at last give us the joy of full communion with our Orthodox brethren? The answer remains shrouded in the mystery of divine Providence. However, trust in God does not dispense us from personal commitment. This requires that we intensify above all the *ecumenism of prayer and of holiness*.

8. In this overview, I would like lastly to single out holiness as the highest "peak" in the ecclesial "landscape", since this year too I had the joy of *raising to the honours of the altar so many of the Church's children* who distinguished themselves in fidelity to the Gospel. *Cum Maria contemplemur Christi vultum!* It is in the saints that "God shows to men, in a vivid way, his presence and his face" ([Lumen gentium](#), n. 50).

I praise God for the beatifications and canonizations that took place during my Apostolic Visit to Guatemala City and to Mexico City. Further, how can I fail to mention the canonizations of St Pio of Pietrelcina and of St Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, which moved public opinion?

My [apostolic journey to Poland](#) for the dedication of the Shrine of Divine Mercy in Kraków-Łagiewniki also took place in the sign of holiness. On that occasion I could once again remind our world, tempted to feel discouraged in the face of so many unsolved problems and the unknown threats of the future, that God is "rich in mercy". For those who trust in him nothing is ever lost for good; everything can be pieced together again.

#### 9. *Cum Maria contemplemur Christi vultum!*

Dear co-workers of the Roman Curia, dear brothers and sisters, it is with this invitation that I offer you my very best wishes for Christmas, close at hand. "*Natus est vobis hodie Salvator, qui est Christus Dominus*" (today a Saviour has been born to you; who is Christ the Lord) (Lk 2,11).

May this announcement bring joy to your hearts and give you enthusiasm in your daily work for the Holy See.

On the day of his Birth, may Christ find us with hearts that are ready to greet him and may Mary, Queen of the Holy Rosary, guide us in a motherly way to contemplate his face. Happy Christmas to you all!

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