



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Wednesday 22 December 1999

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. The customary Wednesday Audience is being held today in the liturgical and spiritual atmosphere of Advent, intensified by the approach of the Christmas festivities. The Holy Christmas Novena which we are making in these days is a liturgical journey that accompanies us in our commitment to prepare for the celebration of the great "event" that occurred 20 centuries ago: it invites us to meditate on the deep aspects of the mystery of the Incarnation and to welcome them into our lives.

This year 1999, we are preparing to live an extraordinary event at Christmas. Indeed, on Holy Night, now close, the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 for which the Church has been preparing with faith for so long will begin, and this makes our anticipation even keener. In the last part of the Advent season the liturgy highlights the expectation of all creation. It is as if, after 2,000 years, it feels with renewed joy the arrival of the One who restored even more perfectly its original harmony, marred by sin.

2. Dear brothers and sisters, let us prepare from this moment to live the saving event of Christmas intensely, beginning the Jubilee Year with deep joy. In the poverty of the stable, let us contemplate the great "event" of the Incarnation: God becomes man to meet each of us. Let us allow this great mystery to transform our lives throughout the time of grace of the Jubilee. Let us relive the moving and uplifting experience of the shepherds, who readily welcomed the news brought by the angels and hastened to adore the Saviour, thus becoming the first witnesses of his presence in the world.

3. May the Virgin Mary, who was the first to prepare a worthy dwelling-place for the promised

Messiah and still presents him to the world today, teach us to open, indeed to open wide, the doors of our heart to the Christmas message of light and peace.

With these sentiments and in a context of spiritual joy at the imminent opening of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, I am pleased to extend to each of you my most affectionate good wishes. I also extend these cordial sentiments to those who are burdened with suffering, to those who have to bear the heavy consequences of war and to those who are in particular difficulty. I hope that during the forthcoming festivities everyone will receive the comfort that comes from the Lord's presence, witnessed by significant acts of love and solidarity.

To the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors the Holy Father said:

I warmly welcome the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors present at today's audience, especially those from Trinidad and Tobago, and the United States of America. Upon you and your families, I invoke the joy and peace of the Saviour, and I wish you a happy and blessed Christmas.

The Holy Father also addressed more than 1,500 Poles who work in Italy and 200 pilgrims from Poland, accompanied by Archbishop Szczepan Wesoly, continuing the Polish community's traditional meeting with the Pope before Christmas for an exchange of greetings.

*"God is born, human power is astounded,
The Lord of heaven empties himself!
The fire subsides, the brightness is outshone,
Infinity takes on a finite form!"*

1. Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We are very familiar with this lovely Christmas carol written by Franciszek Karpiński. It captures the essential atmosphere of the Lord's Birth, and brings us into the mystery of the saving events, witnessed to by the night of Bethlehem when the ineffable God stooped down to a human creature, took on human nature and became man for our salvation.

I cordially greet everyone at this audience. I thank you, because you are continuing the tradition of meeting the Pope in the Vatican on Christmas Eve. I greet Cardinal Andrzej Deskur, Archbishop Szczepan Wesoly, the priests who minister to Rome's Polish community, the Ambassador of the Republic of Poland to the Holy See and to Italy, and the representatives of the clergy and of the religious orders present. With this greeting, I would also like to embrace those who are not here today, especially your families and your loved ones.

2. Christmas this year is particularly eloquent. Indeed, at midnight on Christmas Eve the Holy Door will be opened and on the Solemnity of the Lord's Birth, the celebrations of the Great Jubilee will begin in all the Dioceses around the world. Before we gather round the table on Christmas Eve to break the Christmas wafer, we should be keenly aware that it is we ourselves who become sharers in the great events that are wrought in human history and the history of salvation. We Christians will live the Year 2000 in a special way as the memorial of the Incarnation, the coming into the world of Jesus Christ, true God and true Man. Consequently this should be a time of praise and thanksgiving to God for his infinite mercy, a time of fervent prayer and sincere conversion through a change of life, so that each one of us can draw abundantly from the source of grace. The Jubilee is the year of the Lord's grace.

I thank divine Providence, because in the year that is closing I was once again granted to visit my homeland. I pray to God that that pilgrimage will produce abundant fruits in private and in public life.

3. Although there are still two days until Christmas Eve, I am already breaking the Christmas wafer with my compatriots in our homeland and all over the world, and offer them my good wishes. I embrace in prayer the Church in Poland, together with her Pastors, led by the Cardinal Primate and all our society - everyone, without exception. I would very much like to be close to each of you, to each Polish family and to each Polish home, especially where there is suffering and pain and where loneliness and the bitterness of neglect are felt.

May the spirit of the Great Jubilee enkindle in hearts the sacred fire of love throughout my country.

May mercy, kindness and human solidarity be guests in our homes. May these joyful festivities for the birth of Jesus Christ help bring people closer to one another, and I long to share in this union of hearts. For this I pray fervently to God, who "so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (*Jn* 3: 16).