



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II TO THE YOUNG PEOPLE GATHERED IN THE VATICAN BASILICA

Wednesday, 27 December 1978

Beloved boys and girls, and beloved young people!

Today, too, you have come in large numbers to visit the Pope. And I thank you heartily for this meeting, so festive and affectionate, which gives joy and hope, prolonging the atmosphere of Christmas serenity, so sweet and so beautiful.

In particular, I want to address a cordial greeting to pilgrims from the diocese of Caserta, accompanied by their dear Bishop. Welcome! I am very happy to receive you.

1. We are in Christmas week and the deepest feeling we continue to experience is that of joy. Who knows what a magnificent Christmas day you spent with your parents, your brothers and sisters, relatives and friends!

You will have prepared the Crib and you will have taken part in Midnight Mass and some of you, perhaps, will have sung the poetic Christmas carols in the choir of your own parish ... Above all many—very many, I hope—will have received Jesus in the Holy Eucharist, thus meeting personally the Divine Master, born on this earth about two thousand years ago. Well done! May this intimate joy never vanish from your hearts!

But where does all this joy, so pure, so sweet, so mysterious, come from? It comes from the fact that Jesus came to this earth, that God himself became man and willed to take his place in our poor and great human history. Jesus is the greatest and most precious gift that the Father bestowed on men and for this reason our hearts exult with joy.

We are well aware that even during the Christmas festive days there were and still are tears and

bitterness; many children, perhaps, spent them in cold, hunger, tears and loneliness ... Yet, in spite of the grief that sometimes penetrates into our lives, Christmas is a ray of light for all, because it reveals to us God's love and makes us feel the presence of Jesus with everyone, especially with those who are suffering. Just for this reason Jesus willed to be born in poverty and in the abandonment of a cave and to be laid in a manger.

There comes into my mind spontaneously the memory of my feelings and of my experiences, beginning with the years of my childhood in my father's house, through the difficult years of youth, the period of the second war, the world war. May it never be repeated in the history of Europe and of the world! Yet even in the worst years, Christmas always brought some ray with it. And this ray penetrated even into the harshest experiences of contempt for man, destruction of his dignity, and cruelty. To realize this, it is enough to pick up the memoirs of men who passed through prisons or concentration camps, through war fronts and through interrogations and trials.

2. The second feeling that springs spontaneously from these Christmas days is, therefore, gratitude.

Who is the Child Jesus? Who is that little baby, poor and frail, born in a cave and laid in a manger? We know he is the Son of God made man! "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." (Jn 1:14).

The Christian doctrine teaches us that the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, that is, the Infinite Knowledge of the Father (the Word), by the work of the Holy Spirit and in the womb of the Virgin Mary assumed "human nature", taking a body and a soul like us.

This is our certainty: we know that Jesus is a man like us, but at the same time he is the "Word Incarnate", He is the Second Person of the Holy Trinity become a man; and therefore in Jesus human nature, and therefore the whole of humanity, is redeemed, saved, ennobled to the extent of participating in "divine life" by means of Grace.

We are all of us in Jesus: our true nobility and dignity has its source in the great and sublime event of Christmas.

Therefore a sense of deep and joyful gratitude to Jesus, who was born for each of us, for our love and for our safety, is spontaneous and logical. Read again and meditate personally on the pages of the Gospel of Matthew and Luke; reflect on the mystery of Bethlehem to understand more and more the true value of Christmas, and never let it degenerate into a feast of the consumer society, or merely an external one.

3. Finally, I will mention further a third feeling which springs from the episode of the shepherds. The angel informs the shepherds, who are completely unaware, that a great event has happened

in Bethlehem: the Saviour is born and they will find him wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. What did the shepherds do? "They went with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger" (Lk 2: 16).

Have you understood the lesson of the shepherds? They listen to the voice of the angel, set out in search of him at once and finally find Jesus. It is a very eloquent and significant historical fact, and it symbolizes the search that man must make to find God. Man is the being who seeks God, because he seeks happiness.

We must all look for Jesus.

Very often we must look for him because we do not yet know him; at other times because we have lost him; and at other times, on the contrary, we look for him in order to know him better, to love him more and to make him loved.

It can be said that man's whole life and the whole of human history is a great search for Jesus.

Sometimes the search may be hindered by intellectual difficulties, or by existential motives, seeing so much evil around us and within us; and also by moral problems, it being then necessary to change one's outlook and way of life.

We must not let ourselves be stopped by the difficulty; but like the shepherds of Bethlehem we must set out courageously and begin to search. All men must have the right and the freedom to look for Jesus! All men must be respected in their search, at whatever point they may be along the way. They must all have also the good will not to wander here and there, without committing themselves completely, but to make for Bethlehem resolutely. Some people have told the story and the route of their journey and their meeting with Jesus in very interesting books which deserve to be read. The majority, on the other hand, keep this stupendous spiritual adventure hidden in their innermost hearts. The essential thing is to seek in order to find, remembering the famous sentence that the great French philosopher and mathematician Blaise Pascal makes Jesus say: "You would not be looking for me, if you had not already found me". (B. Pascal, *Pensées*, 553: Le mystère de Jésus.)

Beloved boys and girls!

The shepherds found Jesus and they "returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them" (Lk 2: 16-20).

Lucky are we who have looked for and found Jesus!

Let us not lose Jesus! Do not lose Jesus! On the contrary, like the shepherds, be witnesses to his

love! This is the Christmas wish that I express to you from the bottom of my heart.

I ask the Blessed Virgin, the mother of Jesus and our mother, that it may always be Christmas in your hearts, in your families, in your schools, in your games, with the joy of your faith, with the commitment of your goodness, with the splendour of your innocence.

May you be helped and sustained in this also by my blessing, which I impart with fatherly affection to you, to your dear ones, and to all those who have joined you at this Audience

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