

THE POPE

'God Is Calling Us to Search for Full Unity'

Rome (NC) — Here is the NC News translation of Pope John Paul II's talk in German at the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Rome Dec. 11:

Honored brothers and sisters in Christ, "Jesus Christ yesterday and today, and the same for ever" (Heb. 13:8).



So is it written under the image of the pantocrator in the apse of this Christ-church. It is with these words that I greet the Evangelical-Lutheran community in Rome and all here present. I thank the representatives of the community for their fraternal invitation to make this visit. We are gathered here in the name of Jesus Christ and under his word, in order to acknowledge our common savior and Kyrios, to laud and praise him, in the union of our hearts and likewise with one voice as well. The eternal word of God became man and set up his tent amongst us (cf. Jn. 1:14).

On this noteworthy hour on the third Sunday of Advent, I would bear witness together with you to this our one Lord and redeemer, who is yesterday, today and forever. In thankfulness, let us thus remember our common origin, the gift of our redemption and the common goal of our pilgrim way. We all stand under the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the means and the cornerstone in which all the being, meaning, health and salvation of this world and our life is enclosed.

Our ears and hearts are atune together in this time of salvation of Advent: they hear and receive the joyful message of him who has already come and will come back at the end. In the events of our daily life we often experience the oppressive reality of this intermediate period. Should we not, therefore, think more and more of the situation in which John the Baptist found himself? As

the Gospel tells us, he stood in a situation of decision. He had to overcome the contradiction between his concept of the Messiah and his own personal position, conditioned by imprisonment and threat of death. John's query to Jesus was, therefore, a grave one and arose out of great need, "Are you he who is to come, or do we look for another?"

Jesus went to meet the troubled questioning of his forerunner and called his faith to witness: the time of salvation, God's, has come. The Messiah is here. Of course, signs and wonders in themselves have nothing conclusive about them. However, whoever knows how to understand the signs as an indication of fulfillment of the prophecies of the Old Testament in the present "kairos" may rejoice at being a citizen of God's eschatological realm.

Jesus made himself known to his harbinger, who prepared his way, and who stood at the threshold of his future. "Among all men there has been no greater born than John the Baptist," so the Lord bore witness. "Yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." By that Jesus meant people who are poor and needy in every respect, and who come to believe in salvation in Jesus Christ. Such a man may open heart and mouth, to join in Mary's song of praise: "My being proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit finds joy in God my savior" (Lk. 1:46-7).

Honored brothers and sisters in Christ, the gift of this meeting moves me from the bottom of my heart. I wanted this meeting to occur exactly in Advent. It is an outstanding occasion, to look together to the Lord and wait upon the God of our salvation.

We are now already near the year 2000. "We find ourselves in a certain way in the time of a new Advent, in a time of waiting" (encyclical Redemptor Hominis, n.1). That is why I have come to our neighbors, to those citizens of this city "who are linked by the bond of a specially close relationship" (ec. II Vat. Decree on Ecumenism, n.19). I have come here to consider with you our common mystery

of the faith which is Advent, its deep and manifold richness, in prayer and meditation.

I have come because the spirit of God is calling us to search for full unity of Christians through ecumenical dialogue. We know of the difficult history of this Evangelical-Lutheran community in Rome, its beginning marked with care and its development through light and shade in the conditions of this city. The question comes before us all the more pressingly, "May we — in spite of all human weakness, in spite of the insufficiencies of the past centuries — mistrust the grace of the Lord, which has been revealed in these latter days through the word of the Holy Spirit, that which we have received through the council?" (cf. Decree on Ecumenism n.6).

So we find ourselves, even with the apparent divisions in doctrine and life, still bound together most deeply in the solidarity of all Christians in Advent. We yearn for unity, and we concern ourselves with unity, without letting ourselves be discouraged by the difficulties which can arise along the way (cf. Decree on Ecumenism 6).

Finally, in the year of remembrance of the birth of Martin Luther 500 years ago, we seem to discern the distant dawn of the advent of a recomposition of our unity and community. This unity is a fruit of daily renewing, conversion and repentance on the part of all Christians in the light of the eternal word of God. It is likewise the best manner of preparing the way for God's arrival in our world.

Let us follow — in the great model of the time of Advent — let us follow the example of John the Baptist, of the voice of one calling in the desert, "Make straight the way of the Lord" (Jn. 1:23). Let us follow the call to reconciliation with God and each other. Christ, the ruler of all, is not only over us, but he is also among us, as the Kyrios, who was, who is, and who shall be in eternity.

And now, from my heart I wish you and your families a blessed Christmas feast.

Pope May Note Holy Year at Prison Holding Assailant

By John Thavis

Vatican City (NC) — Pope John Paul II will make a Christmas visit to a Rome prison to celebrate a Holy Year Mass that may be televised to other prisons around the world, the Vatican announced Dec. 6.

Pope John Paul will probably

travel to Rebibbia prison on Dec. 26, Vatican officials said, where convicted papal assailant Mehmet Ali Agca is serving a life sentence for his May, 1981, attack on the pope.

On Dec. 7 the Italian Catholic news agency ASCA quoted unnamed Vatican sources as saying the pope

asked to meet Agca during the prison visit.

The ASCA report said Vatican and Italian Justice Ministry officials were working out details of the meeting, and added that government officials see no major obstacles to the face-to-face encounter.

The Vatican Press Office had no comment on the report of a planned meeting.

The pope will give inmates a special indulgence granted during the Holy Year, according to Archbishop Mario Schierano, head of the Vatican's Holy Year committee.

Pope John Paul is the third pope in modern times to have visited a prison, Vatican sources said.

Pope John XXIII visited Rome's Regina Coeli (Queen of Heaven) jail on Dec. 26, 1958, and Pope Paul VI said Mass there on April 9, 1964.

"Pope John Paul will probably visit Rebibbia prison rather than Regina Coeli because Rebibbia is larger and houses both men and women," Archbishop Schierano said.

"We hope the visit will be televised so the large number of prison inmates around the world can share indirectly in the event," he added.

The Italian television network RAI often films special papal events and offers worldwide distribution via satellite.

The Rebibbia prison holds

some of Italy's toughest criminals, as well as 51 people awaiting trial in January on charges of armed insurrection, attempted murder, kidnapping and robbery.

Agca was brought early last summer from a top security prison in Ascoli Piceno, Italy, to Rebibbia for questioning in the continuing investigation into the papal shooting.

Magistrates from Italy and Bulgaria have investigated Agca's claim that there was a plot carried out with the help of Bulgarians and with the knowledge of the KGB, the Soviet secret service.

On Dec. 6, two Bulgarian investigators arrived in Rome for another round of in-

tensive questioning of Agca and examination of his past testimony.

Missioner Home to Visit

Sister Joanne Lecsese, a Missionary Sister of the Precious Blood stationed in the Republic of South Africa, is visiting her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Nicholas Lecsese of Edgemere Drive for a short holiday.

Sister Joanne is a biology teacher in Ipopo. She has been at her present mission for three years.

Pope: Family Life Is Threatened In Puerto Rico

Vatican City (NC) -- Pope John Paul II urged Puerto Rico's bishops to fight a systematic campaign against family life on their island that he said includes sterilization, legal abortion and a "divorce mentality."

The pope spoke Nov. 24 to Cardinal Luis Aponte Martinez of San Juan and two other bishops making their regular five-year visits to the Holy See.

Although Puerto Ricans are citizens of the United States, their bishops are considered by the Vatican as

separate from the U.S. hierarchy.

"The private and public forces that militate against the family in Puerto Rico are powerful and highly destructive," the pope said.

For more than 80 years, he said, the Puerto Rican church has had to confront the fact of civil marriage and divorce, "with the inevitable development of a divorce mentality."

"Birth control using immoral means, including direct sterilization, has been promoted in your island for about 50 years," he said. "Legal abortion has been a reality for a little more than 10 years."

The U.S. Supreme Court's 1973 abortion decision legalized abortion in Puerto Rico.

The pope said that despite such practices, the teaching of the Puerto Rican church "has not yet been weakened or deformed in order to adapt itself to the morality of the so-called modern mentality."

He encouraged the bishops to continue to impart church teachings on the family, which he said was of particular importance to society.

The pope defined a priest as "above all, a man of prayer and a master of faith." He also warned of the "terrible temptation, in which many have unfortunately fallen, to abandon prayer in favor of ministries of secondary importance or of a sterile activism."

We wish everyone in Sibley Country a very Happy Holiday



Fraudulent Petitions Rise Again
The fraudulent petitions which state that Madalyn Murray O'Hair is eliminating religious programming from the airways have surfaced again in widely separate areas of the diocese.
Despite the fact that nothing of the sort claimed in the petitions is actually going on, diocesan may be misled because of the cleverness of the authors of the fraud.
Stacks of petition forms have been found in recent weeks in Rochester area churches. The fraud has circulated over and over and millions of well-intentioned people have been duped in the past several years.

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