

Pope John Paul II's Message 'Urbi et Orbi' Church Renews Preferential Option for Poor

Vatican City (NC) — Here is the Vatican text of Pope John Paul II's "Urbi et Orbi" message delivered Dec. 25 from the balcony of St. Peter's Basilica.

1. You, who though you were rich became poor for our sake, so that we might become rich (cf. 2 Cor 8:9). You, Jesus Christ, born on Bethlehem night in a stable and laid in manger, because there was no room for you at the inn (cf. Lk 2:7). You, the son of the living God, of one being with the Father, not made, but begotten from eternity. You, the Word, God from God, Light from Light. The church and humanity, the city of Rome and the whole world (urbis et orbis), greet you today. There surround you the anxious hearts of the people of today, as they contemplate you in the mystery of your birth.



2. You became poor: poor on Bethlehem night, poor in the house at Nazareth, stripped of everything at the hour of your death on the cross. Jesus Christ, you alone were able to say: "Blessed are you poor..." (Lk 6:20), "blessed are the poor in spirit" (Mt 5:3). You were able to say it because you alone knew how much poverty man needed, in order to become rich with the wealth that God gives to the human heart.

3. Behold, on Bethlehem night we contemplate — every year we contemplate — in utter wonderment, the mystery of your birth. How poor God has become, how rich man has become, blessed is the poverty of God, that has become the greatest source of man's enriching.

4. "Blessed are the poor in spirit." These are the words written in the very heart of your Gospel, from that Bethlehem night onwards. The words that are the church's holiest inheritance. We do not cease to profess the amazing truth contained in the depths of those words. We do not cease to re-read this truth through the mystery of Bethlehem night, through the entire testimony of him who had nowhere "to place his head" (Mt 8:20), through the cross upon which he "emptied himself" in order to make man rich in a full and definitive way.

We re-read it in order to have in us, with pure hearts, with our heads held high, "this mind... which was in Christ Jesus" (Phil 2:5), in order not to succumb in any age to the temptations of the various forms of materialism which strike at the very heart of this truth: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

5. Let us re-read this truth:

- In order to draw strength from it, and to be fully humble before it.
- In order to be able to confront every revolution or change of system with the Gospel of human dignity, human work and community love.
- In order to be able to bear witness — in the strength of this truth and infinitely humble before it — to all of those who, in every vocation, every state of life and every profession, "are poor in spirit," to all of those to whom belongs the kingdom of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

6. Are there not today, all over the world, many "rich people" who are frighteningly poor?

Are there not people rich in material goods, power, fame... and yet who are poor? Poor by reason of the great emptiness of the human heart which has not opened itself to God and neighbor.

And are there not poor people, who are materially disadvantaged, persecuted, oppressed, discriminated against... who are rich? Rich with that inner wealth that flows directly from the heart of the God-man. From the mystery of the birth of God.

7. The church that travels through a world in which there is so much inequality, oppression, struggle — that travels through a world divided between West and East, between South and North, this church today stands before you, the Son of God, born of the Virgin Mary, — "the son of the carpenter" (Mt 13:55) — and she wishes to read anew, in the mystery of Bethlehem night, the meaning of her mission in the world.

In you, who became poor for our sake, the church desires to discover anew the strength of the beatitude of the poor — of the poor in spirit to whom belongs the kingdom of heaven, and she desires to remain faithful to it.

With the power of this beatitude she desires to transform people, societies and systems. She desires to build "the new earth and the new heavens" in which dwell justice and peace.

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased." (Lk 2:14).

8. Profoundly aware of this mission, and in the strength of the truth of the beatitude uttered by you through your birth as Son of God and of man, we desire to proclaim in a particular way our fraternal union with all people, and especially with those who are suffering because they lack bare necessities, with those who make up the great multitude of the poor. This multitude — perhaps without knowing it — is following you, precisely you, the Good Shepherd, the Son of God, who became poor for our sake, that we might become rich through your poverty.

The days just past have brought us consoling signs of a renewed sensitivity on the part of citizens and leaders. As we rejoice at the contribution being made by civil authorities, church bodies and private institutions to the fight against famine, we once more manifest our solidarity with the countless multitude of the poor, with their rights, with their hopes.

We affirm our solidarity with all the poor of the modern world, in the tragically concrete and daily reality of their sufferings:

- With the peoples of Ethiopia, Mozambique and other regions of Africa, decimated by the scourge of famine and drought, and with all those who, in other parts of the world, too, are dying of hunger.

- With the thousands of refugees who find themselves forcibly far from their homelands, and, deprived like Christ of a roof, are very often living in conditions unworthy of human beings.

- With the unemployed waiting for work that will enable them to earn an honest living and to make their own contribution to the building-up of society.

- With those who, through sickness, old age or misfortune, are tasting the bitter cup of solitude and abandonment.

We likewise affirm our solidarity:

- With the widows and orphans who mourn their husbands and fathers who were treacherously snatched from their affection and who never returned home.

- With the families of those who have paid with their lives for their commitment to preaching the Gospel and putting into practice the church's social teaching.

- With the victims of kidnappings, still in the hands of those who seized them.

- With the families that are suffering from the moral upheaval introduced into them by the cynical society of consumerism.

- With those struggling to escape from the toils of drugs, violence, criminal organizations.

Finally, we affirm our solidarity with all the victims of those other forms of poverty which strike at the spiritual and social values of the individual:

- With those who are deprived of the right to freedom of movement, to personal security, to life itself.

- With those who are excluded, by reason of their nationality or race, from equal dignity with the men and women of the same land.

- With those who cannot freely express their thoughts, or freely profess and practice their religion.

- With those who must pay, by exclusion from society or even by imprisonment, for their legitimate dissent from the ideology of regimes.

- With those who are subjected to forms of psychological violence, which profane the inner sanctuary of the conscience, ignobly attacking personal dignity.

Before you, the eternal Word who deigned to be born in the squalor of a stable in order to make men rich with your divinity, the church renews her preferential option for the poor.

She likewise prays that the light shining from the crib will disperse the darkness of error, hatred and selfishness which weighs on human hearts, and will convince them to commit themselves to working for a world in which the values of justice and love — ever more widely shared and translated into deeds — will prepare the way for that peace which the angels proclaimed, for the hope and joy of all, in the sky of Bethlehem.

Fr. Paul J. Cuddy



On the Right Side

Wonderings Of the Laity

In Advent a group in our parish gathered for a morning of spiritual exercises: Mass, prayers, scriptural rosary, conference, concluding with Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament which our people miss greatly. A 40-minute question period brought some of the wonderings of the laity.

Q. Why don't you speak louder?

Forty-five years ago Father Kress and I were assistants to an able preacher, Father William Byrne in Ithaca. Father Don Cleary was chaplain at Cornell University but resided at our rectory. One evening at supper Father Byrne observed: "About one-third of any given congregation are a little hard of hearing. Most of them do not realize it. But it is necessary to articulate clearly and distinctly, and to speak loudly." It is a terrible cross for parishioners to sit through a homily, and to understand only parts of it, as the priest or deacon blithely gives forth what he thinks is an important message.

Why are preachers in churches so often not understood very well? Sometimes it is the acoustics of the building. Sometimes it is a poor loud speaking system. But more often it is because the priest or deacon does not use the microphone properly. In some parishes the priest weaves away from the microphone so his words become an unintelligible blur. A funny thing happened at Shortsville last August: I was supplying for Father William Cosgrove and after the 8:00 Mass had complaints that the homily couldn't be heard very well. So I practiced on the use of the mike, and just before 10 o'clock Mass, asked the congregation of about 300

"I was told at the last Mass that you couldn't hear. Can you hear me now?" About 20 voices from the back replied simultaneously. "No!" The congregation roared with laughter that people who could not hear, could answer the question. Anyway, I did enunciate more clearly, speak more loudly, articulate more distinctly, and everyone went home happy. Many bought copies of "Treasury of Prayers" on the way out.

Q. Why do we need deacons?

We have three deacons at Holy Trinity: Deacon Leo Kester, who does hospital visitation, brings Holy Communion to the sick, does home visitation and many other good things. Deacon Joe Fox is extended to a broader service, involved with pre-Cana, RCIA family renewal, some parish communion calls. Deacon Stan Zawacki specializes in jail ministry in Rochester and Attica, and assists at Old St. Mary's in Rochester. Deacon Greg Doyle, of Doyle Detective Agency, Inc., moved from Holy Trinity to St. Rita's, West Webster, but his apostolate is to the chemically dependent, which also includes strong support to families of the chemically dependent. They would be climbing the walls if it were not for such groups as this and Al Anon which give emotional support. His apostolate is at St. Augustine's, at the Matt Talbot Center, Chili. All these deacons take their turn preaching and baptizing. I don't know much about deacons in other parishes, but if ours are typical, the Church and the parish are blessed. There was some wonderment whether the wives of deacons might become unduly intrusive, but from what I hear most of them are wonderfully supportive without being obnoxious. So let us bless God for the deacons, their wives, and the work which they do so well.

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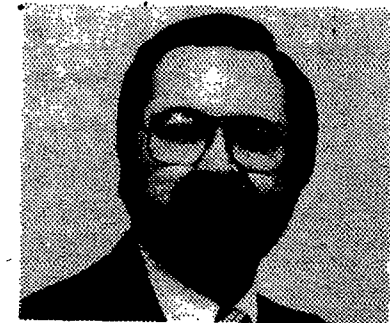


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THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER



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Are there ways to help in the early phase of grief? Early grief is characterized by feelings of shock, confusion and uncertainty. You can help at this time with practical concerns such as driving the grieving to the store, cooking, and babysitting. Reassuring the bereaved that you truly want to help and intend to do so are important. When people are grieving they cannot always take the initiative, so it really helps to go to them and suggest ways you can assist. Always leave them free, of course, to decline your offer. The funeral and visitation are designed to bring support from friends and loved ones. Even if you can't think of something to say, attend and show by your presence that you care.

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