

Into the Deep

Congratulations! We made it to 2001. We survived Y2K, the GST, the Olympics, the Paralympics and, most significant of all, the celebrations of the Great Jubilee.

It was a big effort, wasn't it? On top of all the joys and struggles which are part of every year, we came through the big one.

In a spirit of gratitude Pope John Paul II has a message for us. It is to be found in his Apostolic Letter issued on 6 January 2001, 'At the Beginning of the New Millennium' (Novo Millennio Ineunte).

In this letter, the Pope does two things. He brings closure to the Jubilee by reflecting on all its fruits. Then he outlines a pastoral agenda for the new millennium.

His letter is filled with optimism and hope. 'Put out into the deep' is the opening catchphrase, inspired by the Gospel story of the Apostles' great catch (Luke 5:4-6).

Through Peter's Eyes

We were tired. We had been fishing all night. So when Jesus turned to me and said, 'Peter, put out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch.' I was a little taken aback. I mean, he might be the teacher but who was the experienced fisherman here?

Still, there was something about this man that had already won my trust, and I found myself saying, 'Master, we fished all night and caught nothing. But, if you say so...' We put out into the deep.

I shall never forget what followed. We caught so many fish our nets began to break. Our mates came to our aid, and we filled both boats to sinking point.

I was overcome by the realization that this man was truly of God! With my own eyes, and on my own boat, I had witnessed the power of the Lord. Me! A simple fisherman. I felt undeserving of such a gift. But how my heart burned within. I would give anything to follow him... (See Luke 5:1-11)

Give thanks

John Paul II begins *Novo Millennio Ineunte* by reflecting on the events of 2000. The fruits of the Great Jubilee are immeasurable. With extraordinary energy the people of God went through the 'Holy Door' which is Christ. Countless hearts were touched. Grace has been poured out on the Church. For all this the Pope expresses his desire to share with the faithful a song of praise and thanksgiving.

Was the Jubilee a success?

Ultimately our generous efforts, along with our inevitable failings, can only be judged by God. But who can fail to give thanks for the marvels the Lord has worked for us in the space of a year?

During the Jubilee we witnessed:

- A great prayer of praise of Christ our Saviour resounding throughout the world.
- Gestures of repentance, as individuals and as a church.
- Celebrations of the faith of saints and martyrs.
- A continuous flow of pilgrims.
- Pope John Paul II's pilgrimage to the Holy Land.
- The Eucharistic Congress.
- International youth gathering.
- Efforts to address the international debt of the poorest countries.
- Ecumenical steps.

We have been truly blessed!

Now is the time to capitalize upon the grace of the Jubilee year, to form new resolutions that will send us forth to proclaim the kingdom of God. Trusting in Christ we must 'put out into the deep'.

But take care. Pastoral action must be grounded in contemplation and prayer. Before we 'do' anything, we must 'be' with Christ.

Be with Christ

Contemplate the face of Christ

After a year of special celebrations of the mystery of Christ we return to our ordinary routine focused ever more firmly on the face of the Lord. This is the core of the legacy left by the Great Jubilee, says the Pope: *contemplation of the face of Christ*. As we gaze upon the Lord, a number of points of meditation are offered in Chapter II:

The face in the Gospels

Saint Jerome once said: 'Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ.' The Gospels are not a biography of Jesus, however their presentation of Jesus the Nazarene has historical foundations. The Gospels come to us through the collection of testimonies of the early Christians as they shared their experience of the risen Jesus. Inspired by the Holy Spirit moving in the early church, these sacred texts illuminate the face of Christ.

A face recognised in faith

It was not easy to believe in Jesus even for those disciples who physically saw and touched him. Only through faith could they fully enter into the mystery of Christ. It is the same for us today. To gaze upon the Lord's face requires more than human resolve. In silence and prayer we must be led by grace.

A face of mysterious depths

Jesus, Son of God, came into the world as a man, born of a woman. Heaven and earth, Divine Word and human flesh, the mystery of Christ involves the inseparable union of these two dimensions. If a previous generation erred by a tendency to diminish Christ's humanity, today's generation is in danger of ignoring his divinity.

The face of the Son

The Gospels present Jesus as declaring his own mystery as Son of the Father. From the perspective of John's Gospel, in daring to call God his Father Jesus was put to death (Jn 5:18).

The face of sorrow

To contemplate the face of Christ is to confront the paradox of the cross. How can it be that the Son of God felt utterly abandoned by God and died the humiliating death of a criminal? This is a mystery of unfathomable depths into which the lives of the saints offer precious insights.

Before we 'do', let us 'be' with Christ

Some ideas for everyday life:

- *Read the Gospel at the start of each day.*
- *Spend time in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament.*
- *Contemplate a Christian icon.*
- *Take in a scene of natural beauty.*
- *Gaze upon the face of a newborn.*
- *Spend Sunday (the Lord's Day) as a day of rest, prayer, family.*
- *Renew your sacrament as husband and wife: just 'be' with one another at the end of each day.*
- *Listen deeply. In conversations listen not only to people's words, but also their hearts.*
- *Draw close to someone who knew Jesus intimately: reflect on the writings of a saint.*
- *Unclutter your life materially; create some breathing space for your soul.*
- *Sit with someone in their pain; know that you are in the presence of the crucified Christ.*
- *Revel with somebody in their joy! Glimpse the face of the Risen One.*

Unforgettable

What is the Pope's strongest memory of the Great Jubilee? In n.9 he tells us: the image of great crowds of young people swarming through the city of Rome, high spirited and eager to pray, seeking meaning and true friendship.

John Paul II notes that sometimes we see only the 'problems' of youth. The Jubilee challenged that view! It showed us that young people long for the joy and freedom of knowing Christ. Responding to their thirst, the Pope had no hesitation in asking them to make a radical choice for the gospel.

Start afresh

Start afresh with Christ

Christ has promised to be with us always. It is with this assurance that John Paul II poses a question for the Church: 'What must we do?' The question is optimistic, but not naïve. Faced with the enormous challenges of our time, the Pope acknowledges that there is no magic formula that will 'fix' everything. Our hope rests not in a formula but in a Person. It is not a matter of inventing a new 'program'. The program already exists: the Gospel and the living Tradition. But it must be translated into pastoral initiatives adapted to the situation of individual communities. It is vital that local churches plan the journey ahead, developing specific goals and methods for bringing gospel values to society and culture.

To assist in this task, the Pope outlines in Chapter III certain pastoral priorities emerging from the Jubilee. These are summarized below.

Pastoral priorities for the new millennium

Holiness

The call to holiness is intrinsic to the mystery of the Church. Every baptized person is called to holiness, to live everyday life in the spirit of Christ. But can holiness ever be 'planned'? Yes, in the sense that the very choice to place pastoral planning under the heading of 'holiness' impacts on the unfolding of that plan. 'Holiness' as part of pastoral planning implies actively calling people to recognize that ordinary Christian living involves reaching for a high standard, a decision not to settle for religious mediocrity. Paths to holiness are personal. Training in holiness must be adapted to people's specific vocation and needs.

Prayer

Prayer fuels that 'conversation' through which we become intimate friends of Christ. Through prayer we meet Christ, not only asking help, but also thanking, praising, adoring, contemplating and listening until the heart 'falls in love'. Our Christian communities must become 'schools'

of prayer, responsive to that thirst for spirituality which, despite widespread secularisation, is one of the 'signs of the times'. Christians without a solid prayer life are Christians-at-risk. Their faith can gradually be undermined and substitutes embraced. Essential to a pastoral plan is teaching people to pray and a climate of prayer pervading our parishes.

Sunday Eucharist

Sharing in the Eucharist is the heart of Sunday for every baptized person. Celebration of the Lord's Day is more than conforming to a 'rule', it is the mark of a consistent Christian life. Especially in societies where Christian faith is unsupported by the surrounding culture, the gathering of the faithful at the Sunday Eucharist is a vital expression of solidarity.

Sacrament of Reconciliation

Appealing especially to priests, the Pope asks for renewed pastoral courage, confidence, creativity and perseverance in leading people to value and experience the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

The primacy of grace

The inevitable temptation in the spiritual journey of every individual and community is to think that results depend on our ability to act and plan. When we think 'it's all up to us' is it any wonder that we wind up feeling frustrated and discouraged? Only a life of deep prayer can keep us focused on Christ and moving with the Spirit.

Listening to the Word

Since the Second Vatican Council, great progress has been made in restoring Scripture to its rightful place in the Church. Attention to the Word of God is giving new life to the work of catechesis and evangelization. The Pope calls for this development to be consolidated and deepened. Particular mention is made of the tradition of lectio divina and the importance of ensuring that every family has a bible.

Proclaiming the Word

Over the years the Pope has spoken often of the new evangelization. At the start of the new millennium he repeats this summons. With courage and passion Christians everywhere must step out and proclaim the gift of Christ to the world. The mission cannot be left to a group of 'specialists', it is the responsibility of the whole People of God and must find expression as an everyday commitment.

Go forward in **hope**

Step out in love

Chapter IV highlights another key focus for commitment and planning: the love and unity between believers which reveals the very essence of the Church. We must make the Church the home and school of communion. How? Six tasks are outlined:

1. Promote a spirituality of communion wherever Christians are formed—in the family, in parishes, in seminaries, etc.
2. Make room for the diversity of the gifts of the Spirit. Special mention is made of raising up vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life, the promotion of ecclesial movements, and the pastoral care of married couples and families.
3. Further ecumenical dialogue. In Jesus' prayer, 'May they all be one', we base our hope that full and visible communion will one day be a reality on earth.

4. Share life with the poor. Don't just 'help' the poor, get close to them as brothers and sisters.
5. Respond to contemporary challenges such as world peace, human rights, ecological issues.
6. Engage in interreligious dialogue. This involves both a profound willingness to listen to people of other religions and a joyful confidence in sharing what is unique to Christianity.

A practical sign

During the year of Jubilee celebrations many pilgrims made monetary offerings and leaders of the financial sector provided assistance. The Pope has resolved that, after expenses have been covered, all money saved from the Jubilee Year is to be given to charities. (see n.53)

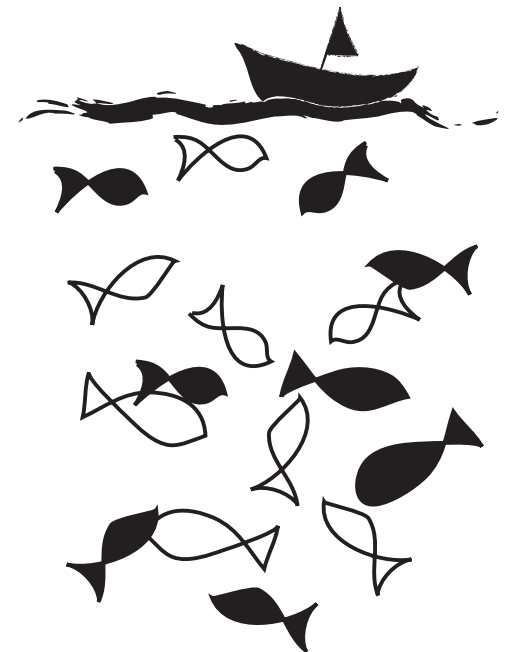
A final word

John Paul II concludes *Novo Millennio Ineunte* urging us to 'go forward in hope!'

Yes, the Jubilee was a special year, but it is not to a dull routine that we return. If during the Jubilee year we made a true pilgrimage of the heart then we have 'stretched our legs' for the journey ahead.

A new millennium lies before us like a vast ocean. What an adventure!

Trusting in the presence of Christ in his Church, let us courageously 'put out into the deep'.



Tips for using this leaflet

This leaflet could be incorporated into your planning as a family, parish, school, movement, diocese. .. wherever Christians gather to set goals and chart their future.

- Don't just read it, pray your way through the Pope's message.
- Which point did you find particularly encouraging or challenging? Explore this point in more detail by reading the actual text of the document.
- Don't be daunted by the breadth of the topic. Take a section; start with that.
- Let your reflections impact upon your goals and plans in the coming year.
- Have courage! 'Put out into the deep.'