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John Paul II: The Church continues to raise its prayer for peace

VATICAN CITY, DEC 21, 2002 (VIS) - This morning in the Clementine Hall, the Pope met with cardinals, members of the pontifical family, the Curia and the Roman prelature for the traditional exchange of Christmas greetings.

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John Paul II began by saying that for him, this Christmas is "especially significant because it falls on the 25th year of my pontificate. It is this reason that urges me to have you participate in my 'thanks' to the Lord for the gifts that he has given me in this long period of time spent in the service of the Universal Church."

"Our gathering," he continued, "gives a particular tone because it takes place during the Year of the Rosary. ... In the apostolic letter 'Rosario Virginis Mariae' I underlined the anthropological value of this prayer, which, helping us in contemplating Christ, guides us to look at man and history in the light of the Gospel."

The Holy Father affirmed that we cannot forget that Christ's face "continues to have a sorrowful expression, of true passion, for the conflicts that stain so many regions

of the world with blood, and for those that threaten to explode with renewed force. The situation in the Holy Land continues to be emblematic, as well as the 'forgotten' wars, that are no less devastating. Terrorism continues to reap victims and dig more graves. Faced by this horizon stained by blood, the Church does not cease to make itself heard, and, above all, continues to raise its prayer."

The Pope later referred to the beauty of creation which reflects a "ray of splendor of Christ's face", but also "the devastation man's neglect is capable of inflicting upon the environment. ... For this reason, I am happy to have been able to bear witness to the Church's commitment to the environment during this year, on different occasions."

In regards to relations with States, "I have reminded everyone," said John

Paul II, "of the urgency to put the dignity of the human person and service to the common good at the center of national and international politics."

Speaking about the celebration of World Youth Day, held in July in Toronto, Canada, the Holy Father recalled "the presence of so many young people" without forgetting so many others "taken in by other messages or misguided by thousands of different proposals. It is up to young people to evangelize their peers."

Afterwards, the Pope recalled the progress made on the ecumenical front, despite "reasons for bitterness. But," he continued, "we must look at the lights rather than the shadows." He also recalled, along with the aforementioned joint Declaration with the Patriarch Bartholomew I, the visit made by the Delegation of

the Greek Orthodox Church with a message from His Beatitude Christodoulous, archbishop of Athens and of all of Greece, and the meeting with the Romanian Orthodox Patriarch Teoctist with whom he signed a common declaration this past October.

"When will the Lord finally give us the joy of full communion with the Orthodox brothers?" he asked. "The answer lies in the mystery of Divine Providence. But faith in God does not exempt us from personal commitment. For this reason, the ecumenism of prayer and holiness must be intensified above all."

The last paragraphs of the Pontiff's speech were dedicated to holiness, "summit of the ecclesiastical landscape." The Holy Father also thanked God for this year's beatifications and canonizations: Pedro de San Jose Betancur, Juan

Diego and the martyrs of Oaxaca during his apostolic trip to Guatemala City and Mexico City, and in Rome Padre Pio of Pietrelcina and St. Josemaria Escriva de Balaguer who inspired "public opinion's particular interest."

He concluded by saying: "My apostolic trip to Poland was also characterized by sanctity, for the dedication of the shrine of Divine Mercy in Krakow- Lagiewniki. On that occasion, I once again reminded our world, tempted by discouragement in the face of so many unresolved problems and threatening unknowns of the future, that God is 'full of mercy'. For those who trust in Him, nothing is definitively lost; everything can be rebuilt."

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