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Celebration of first Vespers of the Solemnity of Mary Most Holy, Mother of God, and “Te Deum” of thanksgiving for the past year

At 17.00 today, in the Vatican Basilica, the Holy Father Francis presided at the first Vespers of the Solemnity of Mary Most Holy Mother of God, followed by the exposition of the Most Holy Sacrament, the singing of the traditional “Te Deum” of thanksgiving at the conclusion of the civil year, and the Eucharistic blessing.

The following is the homily pronounced by the Pope during the celebration of Vespers.

Homily of the Holy Father

“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son” (*Gal*, 4: 4). In this vespertine celebration we breathe the atmosphere of the *fullness of time*. Not because it is the last evening of the solar year, not at all, but because faith makes us contemplate and feel that Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, gave fullness to the time of the world and of human history.

“Born of woman” (v. 4). The first to experience this sense of fullness given by Jesus’ presence was precisely the “woman” of whom He was born. The Mother of the Son incarnate, Mother of God. Through her, so to say, there gushed the fullness of time: through her humble heart, full of faith, through her flesh entirely infused by the Holy Spirit.

From her the Church inherited and continually inherits this inner perception of fullness, which nurtures a *sense of gratitude*, as the only human response worthy of the immense gift of God. An impassioned gratitude that, starting from the contemplation of that Child wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger, extends to everything and to everyone, to the whole world. It is a giving of thanks that reflects Grace; it does not come from us, but from Him; it does not come from the self, but from God, and involves “I” and “us”.

In this atmosphere created by the Holy Spirit, we raise to God our *thanks for the year that draws to an end*, acknowledging that all the good is His gift.

Also this time of the year 2017, which God gave to us full and healthy, we humans have in many ways wasted

and wounded with works of death, with lies and injustices. Wars are the flagrant sign of this recidivist and absurd pride. But so are all the small and great offences to life, to truth, to fraternity, which cause multiple forms of human, social and environmental degradation. We want everything and we must assume, before God, our brothers and creation, our responsibility.

But this evening the grace of Jesus prevails, and its reflection in Mary. Therefore there prevails that gratitude, which, as Bishop of Rome, I feel in my soul, thinking of people who live with an open heart in this city.

I feel a sense of sympathy and gratitude for all those people who every day contribute with small but precious concrete actions to the good of Rome: they try to fulfil their duty to the best of their ability, they move in traffic with purpose and prudence, they respect public places and they point out things that are wrong, they are attentive to the elderly or those in difficulty, and so on. These to a thousand other behaviours express *love for the city* in a concrete way. Without speeches, without advertising, but with a style of *civic education practiced in everyday life*. And so they silently cooperate in the common good.

I also feel a great esteem for parents, teachers and all educators who, in this same style, try to train children and young people in civic sense, in the ethic of responsibility, educating them to feel part of, to take care of, and to take an interest in the reality that surrounds them.

These people, even if they do not make the news, are the majority of the people who live in Rome. And among them, many are in conditions of economic difficulty; yet they do not cry about it, nor do they harbour resentments and grudges, but rather they strive to do their part every day to improve things a little.

Today, in giving thanks to God, I invite you to express also recognition of all these *artisans of the common good*, who love their city not in words, but in actions.
