

Pope says Christians must resolve to help others in 2009

VATICAN CITY - Christians should not fear what the continuing financial crisis will bring in 2009, but they should trust in God and resolve to help one another in the new year, Pope Benedict XVI said.

Leading an evening prayer service in St. Peter's Basilica Dec. 31 to thank God for his blessings in 2008, the pope said people must be grateful first of all for the gift of time, which is a "precious opportunity for doing good."

The prayer service ended with adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and the singing of "Te Deum," a traditional hymn of praise and thanksgiving for the gift of salvation in Christ.

"In our days, marked by uncertainty and concern for the future, it is necessary to experience the living presence of Christ," the pope said.

"This year closes with the awareness of a growing social and economic crisis, which now involves the whole world; it is a crisis that requires of everyone more moderation and solidarity, especially to help people and families in greater difficulty," he said.

Catholic parishes, organizations and aid agencies already are preparing to help record numbers of people in the coming year, the pope said, "but the collaboration of everyone is necessary."

"Even if on the horizon more than a few clouds are gathering over our future, we must not be afraid," Pope Benedict said.

"Our greatest hope as believers is eternal life in the company of Christ and the entire family of God," he said. "This great hope gives us the strength to face and overcome the difficulties of life in this world."

Pope Benedict asked the young adults present to "respond quickly" if God calls them

to church work and to live lives that witness to the values of the Gospel.

The world needs people who are not focused only on their own needs and desires, “because, as I said on Christmas Day, if people look only to their own interests, our world will certainly fall apart,” he said.

On the eve of the feast honoring Mary, Mother of God, the pope said Catholics were placing in Mary’s hands “the expectations and hopes as well as the fears and difficulties that dwell in our hearts as we bid farewell to 2008 and prepare to welcome 2009.”

Before going to visit the Nativity scene in St. Peter’s Square, the pope told people at the prayer service that, while “we stop to contemplate the baby Jesus, our gaze cannot help but turn with recognition toward his mother, who with her ‘yes’ made the gift of redemption possible.”

Mary made it possible for the Word of God to be born on earth, to live among us and to show us that our final destiny is to be with God in heaven, the pope said.

“It is Mary, the star of hope, who leads us to him,” the pope said.