

Pope says Christians thank God for blessings in 2007

VATICAN CITY – Marking the end of a year, Christians turn to God who is eternal, thanking him for the blessings he has given and asking for his help and protection, Pope Benedict XVI said.

Presiding over a Dec. 31 evening prayer service in St. Peter's Basilica, Pope Benedict said that marking the passage from one year to the next "leads us to turn our gaze with intimate recognition to the one who is eternal, to the Lord of time."

The prayer service, in which officials from the Rome city government participated, ended with the singing of the "Te Deum" hymn of thanksgiving to God.

While the civil calendar changes, the pope said, the church is still in Christmastime, which should help Catholics remember that the first thing for which they give thanks is the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

"The fact that the Son assumed a human nature opens the prospect for a radical change in the human condition," he said.

Jesus, he said, "became like us in order to make us like him" – children of God freed from the power of sin.

"Isn't this a fundamental reason for raising our thanks to God? A thanksgiving that cannot help being even more motivated at the end of the year, considering the many benefits and the constant assistance we have experienced in the 12 months just passed," he said.

The prayer of thanksgiving to God, he said, is also a prayer for God's continued help, especially for the poor, for families and for the young in Rome and around the world.

For too many people, poverty makes it almost impossible to look to the future with hope, he said.

And too many young people "are attracted by a false exaltation, or better, a

profanation of their bodies and the banalization of sexuality," he said.

But Catholics in Rome are working to solve these problems, he said, particularly by helping families and by strengthening efforts to educate young people in "the basic values of existence and in correct behavior."

The young themselves, the pope said, are becoming more and more involved in efforts to evangelize their peers and in campus ministry programs at Rome's universities.

Pope Benedict asked God to give special blessings to the priests of the Diocese of Rome and, especially, to the 28 deacons preparing for ordination in April.

The "Te Deum" hymn of thanksgiving, he said, ends with a solemn proclamation of total hope in God and of trust that believers will be with him for eternity.

Pope Benedict asked those at the prayer service to pray that God would help them be beacons of hope in their families, parishes, schools and workplaces "so that a better future could be built for the whole city."

After the prayer service, Pope Benedict went into St. Peter's Square to get a close look at the Nativity scene.

A special escort was provided by the Vatican police department band.