



The Holy See

*Dear Brothers in the Priesthood,
Dear Seminarians and
Theology Students,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

In my mind's eye, I keep alive an evocative image of this morning's Solemn Eucharistic celebration at the Basilica of Our Lady of Bonaria. Near Mary, special Patroness of all of Sardinia, an appointment was made for the parochial communities of the entire region. And now, almost as a prolongation of that spiritual encounter, I have the joy of meeting with you, dear priests, seminarians, students and teachers of the Pontifical Theological Faculty of Sardinia, in this Cathedral, it too dedicated to the holy Virgin Mary. In this ancient temple, renovated and embellished over the course of the years by the care of zealous Pastors, everything speaks of faith: a living faith, witnessed to by the devout safeguarding of the relics of the Martyrs of Cagliari, among which I am happy to note are the Saint Bishops Siricius Martin, Ninian, Hillary, Fabricius and Juvenal.

I wholeheartedly thank Archbishop Giuseppe Mani for the renewed greeting that he has addressed to me in the name of all the Bishops and priests of Cagliari and of the region. Meeting with you, dear priests here present, I think with affection and gratitude of your brethren who work on the Island, on a terrain ploughed and cultivated with apostolic ardour by those who have preceded you. Yes! Sardinia has known priests who, as authentic teachers of the faith, have left wonderful examples of loyalty to Christ and to the Church. The same inestimable treasure of faith, of spirituality and of culture is entrusted to you today. It is placed in your hands so that you may be attentive and wise administrators of it. Take care of it and guard it with Gospel joy and passion!

Now I affectionately address the community of seminarians and of the Theological Faculty, where many of you have been able to carry out doctrinal and pastoral formation, and where currently many young people go to prepare for their future ministerial priesthood. I am anxious to thank the teachers and professors who dedicate themselves daily to such an important apostolic work. To accompany candidates for the priestly mission on their formative journey means above all to help

them conform themselves to Christ. In this duty, you, dear educators and professors, are called to play an irreplaceable role, since it is truly during these years that one lays the foundations of their future priestly ministry. This is why, as on different occasions I have been able to emphasize, it is necessary to guide seminarians to a personal experience of God through personal and communal daily prayer, and above all through the Eucharist, celebrated and experienced as the centre of their very existence. In the Post-Synodal Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* John Paul II wrote: "Intellectual formation in theology and formation in the spiritual life, in particular the life of prayer, meet and strengthen each other, without detracting in any way from the soundness of research or from the spiritual tenor of prayer" (n. 53).

Dear seminarians and students of the Theological Faculty, you know that theological formation - as my Venerable Predecessor recalled further in the cited Apostolic Exhortation - is very complex and demanding work. It must lead you to possess a "complete and unified" vision of revealed truths and of their acceptance into the faith experience of the Church. From this pours forth the double demand of knowing the entirety of Christian truth and knowing those truths not as truths separated one from the other, but in an organic way, as a union, as the one truth of faith in God, building "a synthesis which will be the result of the contributions of the different theological disciplines, the specific nature of which acquires genuine value only in their profound coordination" (*ibid.*, n. 54). This [synthesis] demonstrates to us the unity of truth, the unity of our faith. Besides, in these years, each activity and initiative must dispose you to administer the charity of Christ the Good Shepherd. To him you are called to be tomorrow's ministers and witnesses: ministers of his grace and witnesses of his love. Next to study and pastoral and apostolic experience from which you can draw, do not forget, however, to put the constant quest for intimate communion with Christ in the first place. Here, only here, rests the secret of your true apostolic success.

Dear priests, dear aspirants to the priesthood and to consecrated life, God wants you for himself and calls you to be workers in his vineyard, just as he did many men and women throughout the Christian history of your beautiful Island. They knew to respond with a generous "yes" to his call. I am thinking of, for example, the evangelizing work carried out by the religious: from the Franciscan to the Mercenaries, from the Dominicans to the Jesuits, from the Benedictines to the Vincentians, from the Salesians to the Scolopians, from the Christian School Brothers to the Josephine Fathers, to the Orioni Fathers and so many others still. And how could the great flowering of female religious vocations, for which Sardinia has been a true and proper garden, be forgotten? In many Orders and Congregations Sardinian women are present, especially in cloistered monasteries. Without this great "cloud of witnesses", (cf. Heb 12: 1) it certainly would have been much more difficult to spread the love of Christ in the towns, families, schools, hospitals, prisons and workplaces. What a heritage of good has come, accumulating grace by their dedication! Without the seed of Christianity Sardinia would be more fragile and poor. Together with you I thank God who never lets the witnesses of saints fail to guide his people!

Dear brothers and sisters, it is now up to you to carry on the work of good accomplished by those

who have gone before you. To you, in particular, dear priests - and I address with affection all the priests of Sardinia - I assure my spiritual nearness, so that you may respond to the Lord's call with total loyalty as, even recently, some of your brothers have done. I recall Fr Graziano Muntoni, a priest of the Diocese of Nuoro, killed on Christmas Eve of 1998, while he was going to celebrate Mass, and Fr Battore Carzedda of the P.I.M.E., who gave his life so that believers of all religions would open to sincere dialogue sustained by love. Do not be frightened, do not be discouraged by difficulties: the grain and the weeds, as we know, will grow together until the end of the world (cf. Mt 13: 30). It is important to be seeds of good grain which, fallen to earth, bear fruit. Deepen the awareness of your identity: the priest, for the Church and in the Church, is a humble but real sign of the one, eternal Priest who is Jesus. He must proclaim his word authoritatively, renew his acts of pardon and offering and exercise loving concern in the service of his flock, in communion with the Pastors and faithfully docile to the teaching of the Magisterium. Therefore, rekindle the charism you have received with the imposition of hands (cf. 2 Tm 1: 6) each day, identifying with Jesus Christ in his triple function of sanctifying, teaching and shepherding the flock. May Mary Most Holy, Mother of the Church, protect you and accompany you. On my behalf I bless all of you, with a special remembrance for the elderly and sick priests, and for all the people entrusted to your pastoral care.

Thank you for this meeting and best wishes for your ministry.