



The Holy See

EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION WITH THE NEWLY CREATED CARDINALS

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Sunday, 22 February 1998

1. *"You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church"* (Mt 16:18). Christ's words to the Apostle Peter at Caesarea Philippi clearly illustrate the basic elements of today's celebration. First of all, the feast of the Chair of St Peter is a very important occasion for this basilica, the heart of the Catholic world and the daily goal of many pilgrims. In addition, the presentation of rings to the new Cardinals created at the Ordinary Public Consistory I had the joy of holding yesterday enriches this liturgy with further ecclesial significance.

The Gospel passage presents Peter who, prompted by a divine inspiration, shows his total adherence to Jesus, the promised Messiah and Son of God. In response to this clear profession of faith, which Peter also makes on behalf of the other Apostles, Christ reveals the mission he intends to entrust to him, that of being the "rock" on which the entire spiritual edifice of the Church is built.

"You are Peter!". The ministry, entrusted to Peter and his Successors, of being the solid rock on which the ecclesial community is supported is the guarantee of the Church's unity, the safeguarding of the integrity of the deposit of faith and the foundation of the communion of all the members of God's People. Today's liturgical feast is thus an invitation to reflect on the Bishop of Rome's "Petrine service" to the universal Church. The Cardinals, who constitute the Church's senate and are the Pope's first collaborators in his universal pastoral service, are united in a special way with the Chair of Peter.

How providential it is, then, that today we are celebrating both the feast of the Chair of Peter and the increase of the College of Cardinals by the appointment of 20 new members, prelates who have given proof of their wisdom and deep spirit of communion with the Apostolic See in generous and faithful service to the Ecclesial Community. We entrust them all in prayer to the Lord, so that their Gospel witness may continue to be a luminous example for the entire People of God.

2. Each of them certainly heard the Apostle Peter's words as if they were addressed to him: *"I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ as well as a partaker in the glory that is to be revealed. Tend the flock of God that is in your charge"* (1 Pt 5:1-2).

The "elders", the priests of the Church, cannot fail to be zealous and caring pastors of the "flock of God". These are the thoughts of Peter's Successor on this solemn occasion as he prepares to present to the new Cardinals the cardinalitial ring, a sign of the special spousal bond now linking them to the Church of Rome, which presides in charity. Dear and venerable Brothers, entrusted to you, in close communion of spirit and intention with the Pope, is the mission of bearing witness to the sufferings which Christ still undergoes today in his Mystical Body; at the same time, you are called to proclaim, by your word and your life, the hope that does not disappoint.

Coming from 13 different nations on various continents, you are now incardinated in the Church of Rome. In this way a sublime exchange of gifts takes place between the Church in this city and the Churches on pilgrimage in the various parts of the world. You offer the Church of Rome the variety of your charisms and the spiritual riches of your Christian Communities, venerable by ancient tradition or admirable for the freshness and vitality of their energies. In turn, the Church of Peter and Paul displays her catholicity in a most luminous way, extending her pastoral concern to the Christian Communities of the whole world through your distinguished ecclesial service as Pastors called to the dignity and responsibility of Cardinal. Thus, as Pope Paul VI said at the Consistory in which I myself was raised to the Purple, the College of Cardinals constitutes in a way the "Presbyterium of the World" (*Homily for the presentation of the cardinalitial ring*, 29 June 1967: *Insegnamenti*, V [1967], 352).

3. *"Tend the flock of God ... being examples to the flock"* (1 Pt 5:2-3). By becoming this high ecclesial Senate, venerable Brothers, you are accepting responsibility to be Pastors of the Church at a new and higher level. You are not only entrusted with the office of electing the Pope, but also with that of sharing his concern for all the Christian people. You are already praiseworthy for all the generous and zealous work of your episcopal ministry carried out in renowned Dioceses in so many parts of the world or in dedicated service to the Apostolic See in various and demanding tasks.

The new dignity, to which you are now called by your appointment as Cardinals, is meant to show appreciation of your lengthy work in God's vineyard and to pay tribute to your communities and nations of origin, of which you are the worthy representatives in the Church. At the same time, it invests you with new and more important responsibilities, asking you to be even more available to Christ and to his whole Mystical Body.

This new rootedness in Christ and in the Church thus commits you to a more courageous service of the Gospel and to unreserved dedication to your brothers and sisters. It also asks for your total self-giving to the point of shedding blood, which the purple colour of your cardinalitial robes symbolizes. "Usque ad sanguinis effusionem...". This radical readiness to give your life for Christ is constantly nourished by a strong and humble faith. Be conscious of the mission the Lord entrusts to you today! Rely on him! God is faithful to his promises. Always work for him, in the certainty, as the Apostle Peter says, that *"when the chief Shepherd is manifested you will obtain the unfading crown of glory"* (1 Pt 5:4).

4. *"I myself will pasture my sheep ... The lost I will seek out, the strayed I will bring back"* (Ez 34:15-16). Do not let yourselves be disheartened by life's inevitable difficulties! The prophet Ezekiel, as we heard in the first reading, assures

us that the Lord himself will care for his people. You are called to become the visible sign of God's concern for his inheritance by imitating Christ the Good Shepherd, who gathers humanity, dispersed by sin, into a single flock around himself.

And how can we not emphasize that this task of shepherding the flock is entrusted to you at a special moment in the history of the Church and of humanity? We are living at a historic transition from the second to the third millennium, whose dawn we can see rapidly approaching: we are on our way towards the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. In every part of the world fervent apostolic and missionary activities are under way for making this event an occasion of spiritual renewal for all believers. May this historic moment be an extraordinary springtime of hope for believers and for all humanity!

5. Let us entrust these hopes to the Blessed Virgin Mary, ever present in the Christian Community from its beginning, as, gathered in prayer or dedicated to proclaiming the Gospel to everyone, it awaits and prepares the coming of Christ, the Lord of History. To her, venerable Brothers, we entrust our new ecclesial service with a view to the Great Jubilee event; let us place in her hands the expectations and hopes of every believer and of all humanity.

Amen!

© Copyright 1998 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana