



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF POPE JOHN PAUL II TO JOSEPH AURÈLE PLOURDE, ARCHBISHOP OF OTTAWA

To my venerable Brother Joseph Aurèle Plourde

Archbishop of Ottawa Having been informed of the forthcoming Congress in Ottawa of the *Consociatio Internationalis Studio Iuris Canonici Promovendo*, I am writing to ask you to convey to all those taking part the assurance of my deep pastoral interest and closeness in prayer. I am pleased to know that the theme chosen for the Congress is the New Code of Canon Law. Certainly it is most appropriate that, shortly after the promulgation of the Church's new legislation, special efforts should be made to foster a fuller understanding of its meaning and relevance. I have no doubt that all of you are already striving to do this in your own local Churches and communities, each of you making a unique and important contribution. The present Congress will assuredly aid you in this enterprise as it helps you expand your knowledge of the content of the new Code and deepen your appreciation of it as an instrument at the service of the Church as a whole, of each individual and of every local community. The Church is the edifice of God, of which Christ is the cornerstone; from this foundation the Church receives her durability and solidity (*Lumen Gentium*, 6). It is true to say, therefore, that the legitimacy and significance of the various elements of the Church's life and structure reside in the relationship of these elements to the will of Christ, Founder and Head of the Body. In this sense the present Code, which enunciates essential principles and declares necessary norms for the proper ordering of ecclesial society, is to be seen as a precious endowment, a gift of Christ to his Church: a gift to be received by the whole ecclesial community with joy and gratitude. As such, the laws of canonical discipline call forth a response which is nourished by a vision of faith and warmed by love. Furthermore, the revised Code of Canon Law embodies the directives and the true spirit of the Second Vatican Council, which evoked such a generous response from the entire Catholic community and was also well received by other Christian Churches and ecclesial communities. It is my prayerful hope - and a wish that conforms to the specific nature of the universal pastoral ministry of the Vicar of Christ - that the revised Code should enter ever more fully into the life of the People of God, thus contributing to that continual reformation of which the Church has need and which the Council so ardently advocated (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, 6). On this occasion I would like to recall what I stated in the Apostolic Constitution "Sacrae Disciplinae Leges" about the role of the Code: The code of Canon Law is extremely necessary for the Church. Since the Church is established as a social and visible structure, it must also have norms: in order that its hierarchical and organic structure be visible, in order that the exercise of the functions divinely entrusted to it, especially that of sacred power and of the administration of the sacraments, may be adequately organized; in order that the mutual relations of the faithful may be regulated according to justice based upon charity, with the rights of the individuals guaranteed and well-defined; in order, finally, that common initiatives undertaken to live a Christian life ever more perfectly may be sustained, strengthened and fostered by canonical laws. If the Code is necessary for the Church,

how important are Canon Lawyers who are thoroughly acquainted with the new legislation, who can help interpret it accurately and in conformity with the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, and who can apply it with equity and charity. This is the great challenge and responsibility which belongs to those who in 1984 render a vital service to the Church by studying Canon Law and by properly relating it to the life and mission of the Church. A true understanding of the role of Canon Lawyers within the ecclesial community can follow only from an appropriate consideration of the purpose of the law itself and of the Code that enshrines it. As the above-mentioned Apostolic Constitution points out, the purpose of the Code is "to create such an order in the ecclesial society that, while assigning the primacy to love, grace and charisms, it at the same time renders their organic development easier in the life both of the ecclesial society and of the individual persons who belong to it". In this sense the Code is an "indispensable instrument" of the Church's life and vitality. To work for the proper implementation of the Code is to work for the upbuilding of the Church herself. It is to work for the salvation of the world. It is to play an extraordinarily constructive role in continuing the redemptive mission of Christ himself. Canon Lawyers must be aware of their grave responsibilities in the task of consolidating the life of the Church at every level, according to the spirit of the Gospel, overcoming uncertainties and banishing laxity in the observance of a discipline which, by reason of its ordination to the life and mission of the Church, is truly sacred and salvific. I wish therefore to express my admiration for the invaluable contribution that Canon Lawyers are making to the pastoral and apostolic mission of the Church. As I have stated on other occasions, the new Code is the last major document called for by the Council. With its promulgation we have reached a new stage in the task of bringing about that interior renewal which the Council intended and for which we continue to work and pray. May all canonists persevere in the vital work which lies before them, as generous servants ever willing to follow the Holy Spirit's lead, as faithful stewards seeking to place their talents and gifts fully at the service of the Father's will. With these sentiments, I pray that the Spirit of Truth and Love will strengthen those assembled in Ottawa for this important Congress. Upon all of them, I invoke grace and peace in our Lord Jesus Christ and I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, August 10, 1984.

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