



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE SUPERIORS AND STUDENTS OF THE
ARCHDIOCESAN SEMINARY OF FLORENCE**

Thursday, 30 April 1998

Your Eminence,

Dear Superiors and Students of the Archdiocesan Seminary of Florence,

1. I was very pleased to grant your request to meet the Pope. I know that it corresponds to a deep desire, expressed by your Archbishop, my venerable and dear Brother, Cardinal Silvano Piovanelli, whom I cordially greet and thank. While I was listening to him, I remembered your house of formation, which the Lord gave me the joy of visiting in October 1986 on the occasion of my apostolic pilgrimage to the Archdiocese and city of Florence.

Your coming here today in a sense repays my visit, in order to testify that the seminary is alive and functioning. Dear superiors and students, whom I affectionately welcome, I am indeed aware that your community draws its members from different Dioceses. It consists of seminarians from Florence, San Miniato, Volterra, Massa Marittima, Piombino, without forgetting the young men from Poland and from Kerala, India. You are therefore a community that, in a sense, can rightly call itself international.

No particular circumstance has brought you here today. Nevertheless, what moment could have been more suitable than this, immediately before what is called "*Good Shepherd Sunday*"? Precisely on this Sunday, the fourth of Easter, the World Day of Prayer for Vocations is celebrated. The liturgical and ecclesial context offers our meeting a very significant background and invites us all to feel united, in a communion of prayer and purpose, with all the vocational communities throughout the world, especially with those where, at this particular time of year, priestly ordinations take place.

2. The whole Church is really a "vocational community": she exists because she was called and sent by the Lord to evangelize the people and to make the kingdom of God grow in their midst. The *soul of this spiritual dynamism*, through which every baptized person is invited to discover the gift of God and to employ it in building up the community, *is the*

Holy Spirit. I stressed this remarkable fact in my Message for the 35th World Day of Prayer for Vocations.

The Spirit is like a wind filling the sails of the great ship of the Church. If, however, we look at her closely, she uses numerous other small sails that are the hearts of the baptized. Everyone, dear friends, is invited to hoist his sail and unfurl it with courage, to permit the Spirit to act with all his sanctifying power. By allowing the Spirit to act in one's own life, one also makes the best contribution to the Church's mission.

Do not be afraid, dear seminarians, to unfurl your sails to the breath of the Spirit! Let his power of truth and love enliven every aspect of your existence: your spiritual commitment, the inmost intentions of your conscience, the deepening of your theological study and your experiences of pastoral service, your sentiments and affections, your very corporality. Your whole being is called to respond to the Father through the Son in the Spirit, so that your whole person may become a sign and instrument of Christ, the Good Shepherd.

3. You, dear seminarians, are preparing to become, in the Church and for the Church, "a sacramental representation of Jesus Christ, the Head and Shepherd" (*Pastores dabo vobis*, n. 15), for authoritatively proclaiming his Word, repeating his acts of forgiveness and salvation, particularly in Baptism, Penance and the Eucharist, and showing his loving concern to the point of a total gift of self for the flock (cf. *ibid.*). This expression "*sacramental representation*" is very strong and eloquent. It demands to be meditated on in depth and, above all, to be interiorized in the silence of prayer.

Who in fact could consider himself worthy of such a dignity? The words of the Letter to the Hebrews come to mind: "One does not take the honour upon himself, but he is called by God" (5:4). We must receive this undeserved gift with the humble and courageous willingness of Mary, who says to the angel: "How can this be?", and after having listened to the enlightening response, offers herself without reserve: "Behold, ... let it be to me according to your word" (cf. Lk 1:34-38).

Dear friends, the seminary is the providential period offered to those called to renew, day after day, this "yes" to the Father through the Son in the Spirit. On the basis of this "yes", the priestly ministry can become, in the concrete forms of its historical development, *an "Amen" to God and to the Church, configured to the saving "Amen" of the Good Shepherd*, who gave his life for his sheep (cf. 2 Cor 1:20). For this I pray for you and with you.

For this I invoke the loving intercession of the Queen of Apostles, as I cordially impart to each of you a special Apostolic Blessing.

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