



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO A GROUP OF EUROPEAN BISHOPS
ORDAINED IN THE LAST FIVE YEARS**

Friday, 13 March 1998

Venerable and Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

An old Bishop has come to see the young Bishops, because the young Bishops have come to see the old Bishop. But the same words of St Peter are addressed to all: "*Seniores qui in vobis sunt*".

1. I am pleased to welcome you at the close of your assembly, jointly organized by the Council of European Episcopal Conferences and the Congregation for Bishops. I address my warm and fraternal greetings to you, European Bishops who have been appointed in the last five years.

I would first like to express my gratitude for your communion with the Successor of Peter, which you have clearly expressed in many ways, not the least of which was your affectionate insistence on having this audience. The intention was to send you a Message, but that was not enough. In particular, I thank Cardinal Miloslav Vlk for his words on behalf of you all, which confirm your attachment and devotion to me.

I also express my pleasure with the initiative to hold this conference you are attending, because it gives you the opportunity to experience an intense moment of brotherhood, exchange, dialogue and reflection in the light of the experience which grows in each of you during the first years of your episcopal ministry.

2. "*Being Bishops in Europe today*", as the theme of your congress says, certainly means facing many problems, some of which are very detailed and complex both doctrinally and pastorally. This is made evident by the series of questions you have examined these days in your reports, groups and discussions.

With deep feeling, I would again like to express my spiritual closeness to you and to strengthen you in faith and trust in

Jesus Christ, who has called you and made you Pastors of his people in our time, when we are rapidly approaching the third millennium of the Christian era. He is the same yesterday, today and for ever. He walks beside us. Therefore do not let any difficulty upset you. Rather, trust in him who guides the Church on the paths of history, so that she will continue to serve God's kingdom.

3. This meeting has taken place during the year dedicated to the Holy Spirit: the Spirit of Pentecost, the Spirit of your episcopal consecration, the Spirit of the Second Vatican Council. He is also at work in our day, which sometimes presents aspects not only very different from Gospel values but also from the religious dimension that is connatural to the human being. However, despite appearances, the Spirit never ceases to carry out his silent work in the depths of consciences, preparing souls to accept the announcement of the "*glad tidings*" of salvation in Christ crucified and risen.

This proclamation is primarily our task as Bishops. And it is a great consolation to know that the Holy Spirit is constantly with us, to sustain us in our ministry with the light and strength of his seven gifts. Therefore trust in the Spirit, venerable Brothers, and invoke him with confidence! Implore from him the gift of fortitude, to know how to carry out your episcopal ministry with fearless determination. As the history of the world advances, the believer knows that the triumph foretold in the Book of Revelation is being prepared: "*He who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, I will give him power over the nations ... and I will give him the morning star*" (Rv 2:26, 28).

Sustained by this certainty, deepen your communion in truth and love, persevering with ever new energies in the commitment to evangelization. The Spirit can make your efforts fruitful, even when humanly they may seem destined to failure.

4. Draw strength from assiduous dialogue with God. The Holy Spirit, who "*intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words*" (Rom 8:26), is the soul of prayer. How can we not feel committed to being Pastors who first of all pray? Venerable and dear Brothers, let yourselves be constantly formed by the Spirit himself in the art of listening to God's Word and of ceaseless communion with him. In this way you will be ready and able to understand deeply the priests, religious, faithful and all the men and women to whom your apostolic work is directed. You will be able joyfully and courageously to offer each one of them answers that come from the Bible, the only ones which can satisfy every person's inner thirst for truth and love.

On my part, as I embrace you and assure you of a constant remembrance at the altar of God, I would like to tell you that I in turn rely on your prayer, in order to fulfil in the best possible way the Petrine ministry entrusted to me. May God strengthen the spiritual bond that unites us, a bond sealed by the Holy Spirit and the heavenly intercession of the Virgin Mary, Mother of Christ and of the Church. United, let us continue to work together with renewed zeal in preparing the People of God for the historic date of the Great Jubilee.

With these sentiments, I cordially impart a special Apostolic Blessing to each of you, which I willingly extend to the communities entrusted to your pastoral care.

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