



The Holy See

**SPEECH OF THE HOLY FATHER
ON THE OCCASION OF THE INAUGURATION OF THE METROPOLITAN SEMINARY
IN SALERNO**

*Your Eminence,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,
Distinguished Authorities,
Dear Priests, Religious and Seminarians,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

1. It is a great joy to be with you today for the inauguration of the new Metropolitan Seminary and St Matthew's Home for the Clergy, institutions desired and built by the community of Salerno with the help of the Italian Episcopal Conference and the active support of the region's Bishops. I thank you for inviting me to this significant event and for your affectionate welcome.

I greet the ancient and noble Church of Salerno and the community of Pontecagnano-Faiano. I thank Archbishop Gerardo Pierro, the beloved and zealous Pastor of this Archdiocese, for expressing what you all feel towards the Successor of Peter. My affectionate thoughts also turn to the diocesan presbyterate, the consecrated men and women, the seminarians, the authorities present and everyone who has wished to take part in this important and joyous moment of faith and communion.

I greet Cardinal Michele Giordano, Archbishop of Naples and President of the Episcopal Conference of Campania. With him I spiritually embrace all the prelates of Campania and the peoples of this beloved region, especially those from the distressed area of Sarno.

In fact, on my journey to Salerno I flew over that land which was affected last year by terrible flooding that caused destruction and death. I prayed for the dead and, in particular, I asked for divine support for the persons and families who had been most harshly tried. May they find in Christian hope the strength to build a tranquil future especially for the younger generation, with the support of the national community. I send my cordial greetings to those brothers and sisters, who

are all dear to my heart.

Opening a seminary shows great trust in Christ's work

2. Dear friends, this new Metropolitan Seminary and the St Matthew's Home for the Clergy, which the Church of Salerno has built with loving care, are a providential gift for those called to the priestly ministry and for priests themselves. The seminary in particular, with its modern and functional structure, continues the long tradition of service offered to the neighbouring Dioceses by the Archdiocese of Salerno, where the Pius IX Pontifical Regional Seminary has been located for years. Renewing the spirit of this commitment to communion and collaboration, the Metropolitan Seminary will also accept seminarians from other communities in Campania whose Bishops so request.

The opening of a seminary first presupposes great trust in the work of Christ, who continues to extend his invitation to so many young men who, like the two disciples in the Gospel passage we have just heard, feel called by him: "Rabbi (which means teacher), where are you staying?". This seminary is being opened today so that Jesus can reply to the young men of the Salerno region: "Come and see" (cf. *Jn* 1: 38-39). Indeed, the seminary is called to create an atmosphere where a special experience of communion with Christ can be lived. May the young men who will devote themselves to study and prayer here make their own Andrew's words to his brother Simon: "We have found the Messiah" (*Jn* 1: 41).

3. In this perspective, dear seminarians, I would like to address you in particular: you are the first to celebrate today. This seminary is especially meant for you and for everyone in the future who will be ready to answer God's call and spend the years of necessary formation here.

I hope you will be docile to the Lord's voice and give yourselves generously to him. May you grow here in your commitment to prayer and study, looking upon your sacrifices and daily problems as so many acts of love for those to whom the Lord will send you. You will be able to count on your superiors' wise and generous guidance, on the prayer of the Christian community and, above all, on the motherly presence of the Queen of Apostles, to whom those who are called to act "*in persona Christi*" are particularly entrusted.

Evangelizers must be fully conformed to Christ

4. Dear teachers, you are entrusted with the task of helping future priests to relive the experience of the Upper Room which, in a certain sense, was the first seminary. After instructing the Twelve in the Upper Room, the Teacher washed their feet and, anticipating the bloody sacrifice of the Cross, gave himself totally and for ever under the appearances of bread and wine. Then, in the Upper Room, while they were waiting for Pentecost, the Apostles "with one accord devoted themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary, the Mother of Jesus" (Acts 1: 14).

Dear friends, in training evangelizers for the third millennium, take your inspiration from this eloquent icon. Instil in your students love for the Lord and enthusiasm for his Gospel, so that they

may be fully conformed to Christ, Teacher, Priest and Pastor (cf. *Optatam totius*, n. 5). Teach them fraternal communion. Provide them with a solid theological and cultural training. Above all, ensure that they are "men of God" and, for this very reason, men of charity, poverty and sharing, capable one day of generously ministering to the people of this land which, like all Southern Italy, is marked by old and new challenges and needs more than ever pastors who will bear witness to the Gospel without reserve.

5. By a wise decision, your Archbishop wanted St Matthew's Home for the Clergy to be built next to the seminary. It is meant to help priests live in brotherhood and to experience the many advantages of community life, which was recommended, in its various forms, by the Second Vatican Council (cf. *Presbyterorum ordinis*, n. 8) and is so valuable to them in carrying out the ministry.

I hope that the closeness of the two institutions will give their respective residents a valuable opportunity for fraternal gatherings, communion in charity, mutual remembrance in prayer and encouragement in their service to the Lord.

6. I now have some special words for the other young people I see here. Dear young people, accept Christ's message and respond to his love. He invites each of you to follow him in a personal and specific way. The success of your life depends on your response to his call. Do not let yourselves be enthralled by deceptive and fleeting mirages: Christ is also calling you to holiness in the ordinary conditions of secular life. And if he asks some of you to dedicate yourselves totally to the service of the Gospel in the priesthood or consecrated life, do not be afraid of courageously accepting his invitation, which opens exciting horizons of joy and grace. The Church awaits the contribution of your creativity, your gifts and your youthful enthusiasm.
Seminary is sign of love for Christ and his Church

7. Dear brothers and sisters, this complex which we are about to dedicate is the fruit of the commitment and collaboration of many people. I would like to express my pleasure to all who have devoted their efforts, intelligence and competence to it: to the designers, the builders, the workmen and everyone!

As a concrete sign of your love for Christ and his Church, you have wished to name the new seminary after the Pope who is speaking to you now. I cordially thank you for this affectionate gesture, which strengthens the ancient bonds of the Church in Salerno with the Successor of Peter, the visible principle and foundation of the unity of both faith and communion (cf. *Lumen gentium*, n. 18).

I entrust to Mary, Queen of Apostles and Mother of priests, whose image has been placed like a sentinal over the seminary, everyone who will live, study and work in this stronghold of faith and culture. May she watch lovingly over the efforts of all: may she support them on their journey, so

that they can respond generously to the word of her Son and serve their brethren with constant fidelity.

With these sentiments, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing to each of you present here, to the archdiocesan community and to the whole region of Campania.

At the end of his visit to Salerno, the Holy Father said extemporaneously:

This is the second time I have come to Salerno, but the first time I have visited this part of the city where the seminary is. My best wishes to your community, which is always thinking of the future, since the seminary and seminarians speak to us of the future, of the third millennium. Best wishes for the third millennium of your Diocese. Praised be Jesus Christ! Goodbye!

Salerno, 4 September 1999