



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE COMMUNITY
OF PONTIFICAL ECCLESIASTICAL ACADEMY***

Thursday, 26 April 2001

Your Eminence,

Dear Superiors and Students of the Pontifical Ecclesiastical Academy,

1. This morning I prayed for you all before setting out for Piazza della Minerva, where your 300-year-old institution stands opposite the historical church that preserves the mortal remains of St Catherine of Sienna, who was so devoted to the Successor of Peter. Now I am pleased to meet you and to extend my cordial greeting to you. I thank Archbishop Justo Mullor García, President of the Academy, for the noble words with which he voiced your sentiments, effectively describing the understanding that guides your commitment. I remember with gratitude those who preceded him and who carried out this highly responsible office with dedication and self-denial.

Entering these walls, I could not but think of all who were trained here for their future tasks at the Church's service. How can I forget my Predecessors who founded and appreciated this academy, or spent part of lives there as young priests? The Servant of God Paul VI certainly deserves special mention, but Cardinal Adam Sapieha, the great Pastor who ordained me a priest, also comes to my mind. He entered the academy a year before the Servant of God Raffaele Merry del Val, the future Cardinal Secretary of State, became President. Before these and other ecclesiastics of great spirituality, it is only right to feel committed to imitating their virtues and exemplary dedication to the service of the Church.

Those of you who form the present teacher and student community are all men of the Second Vatican Council; you are also priests who have lived the Great Jubilee of the Incarnation. Therefore everything in your lives, both as individuals and as a group, must converge in the duty to respond to the universal call to holiness, which must sum up the fundamental message of these

two great ecclesial events. You came here to learn to be "experts in humanity", in accordance with Paul VI's evocative phrase, because your mission requires the skill of diplomacy, which is sometimes complex. First and foremost however, you are here for your own sanctification: your future service to the Church and the Pope demand it.

The fact that you are celebrating your 300th anniversary shows that institutions too have their own vital continuity: a project of life and service which, having matured in the past, has been enriched along the way and is now entrusted to this generation, so that they may pass it on to those of the future. In the Church therefore, when true traditions are authentic and the sap of the Gospel flows within them, far from fostering paralysing types of conservatism they spur us on to goals of new ecclesial vitality and creative renewal. The Church walks through history with people of all times.

2. My meeting with you in this Easter season reminds me of chapter 21 of John, in which the Evangelist presents the risen Christ in conversation with Peter and several other Apostles, pausing in their habitual work as fishermen. They had just returned from an exhausting night on the lake of Tiberias. They had caught nothing. Peter and his companions had fished trusting only in their own strength and knowledge as experts in "things of the sea". But when, later, they went fishing relying on Christ's words, their catch was exceptionally abundant. Thus it was not their "technical" expertise that filled their nets with fish. That exceptionally abundant catch occurred through the Word of the Master, who overcame death and with it suffering, hunger, marginalization and ignorance.

3. Ours is a Church which lives in history. Christ founded her on the Apostles, fishers of men (cf. Mt 4,19), so that his actions and his saving words would be repeated through the centuries. Scenes like the one described in chapter 21 of John have often been repeated down the ages. In so many situations the results of apostolic action and also of the action developed in the national or international forums to which you will one day be sent, have appeared meagre and almost useless. Phenomena like secularization, paganizing consumerism and even religious persecution make the proclamation of Christ, who is "the Way, and the Truth, and the Life" (Jn 14,6) very difficult and at times almost impossible.

This academy is also part of that "incarnation" of the Church which is expressed through her presence in the world and in its civil, national or international institutions. What you learn here is directed to taking the Word of God even to the ends of the earth. Therefore it is a Word that must first take hold of your minds, your wills, your lives. If the Gospel has not taken root in your personal and community life, your activities could be reduced to a noble profession in which, with greater or lesser success, you face questions pertaining to the Church or her presence in specific human settings. If, instead, the Gospel is present and firmly rooted in your lives it will tend to give a very precise content to your action in the complex field of international relations. In the midst of a world permeated by material interests that are often contradictory, you must be men of the spirit in the search for harmony, heralds of dialogue, the most convinced and tenacious builders of peace.

You will not be - nor could you ever be - champions of any "reason of State". Although the Church is present in the symphony of nations, she pursues only one concern: to make herself the echo of God's Word in the world in the defence and protection of the human person.

4. The values of all time defended by papal diplomacy focus mainly on the exercise of religious freedom and the safeguard of the Church's rights. Such themes continue to be up to date, even in our day, and at the same time, the Papal Representative's attention is also increasingly focused, especially in the international forums, on other human and social questions of great moral importance. The most urgent task today is the defence of the human person and of the image of God that is in him. You are called to be messengers of the human values whose source is the Gospel, according to which every person is a brother to respect and love.

During the 20th century, there were undeniable scientific and technical achievements in the world in which you will carry out your mission. But from the ethical viewpoint, this world has many worrying aspects, exposed as it is to the temptation to manipulate everything, including the human person. In your action, you must uphold the dignity of the human being whose nature, through the Incarnation of the Son of God, has been raised to a dignity beyond compare (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 22).

Like Simon Peter, like Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael and the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples exhausted by a night in which "they had caught nothing" (cf. Jn 21,3), you too will sometimes be overwhelmed by dejection. Do not give into the temptation of the devil. Rather, draw close to the risen Christ and experience, and make others deeply experience, the power that comes from his own definition of himself: "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End" (Apoc 21,6). Sustained by the strength that emanates from him, you too will have an abundant catch, guiding many other human beings in their search for truth and goodness. It will be enough for you to be faithful to the Gospel, without the slightest hesitation; this will be the way to offer others the opportunity to know the breadth, the length, the height and the depth of Christ's love (cf. Eph 3,18).

5. In the Letter which I wrote at the end of the Holy Year, I echoed Christ's words to Peter: *Duc in altum!* I also extend this invitation to you, who will shortly have to leave Rome for the world, the *Urbe* for the *Orbe*. The world that awaits you is thirsting for God even when it is not aware of it. Recalling the Apostle Philip's meeting with some Greeks, I myself wrote that "like those pilgrims of 2,000 years ago, the men of our own day - often perhaps unconsciously - ask believers not only to 'speak' of Christ, but in a certain sense to 'show' him to them" (*Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 16).

Others must "make Christ visible" in a parish or among a group of young people, in an industrial neighbourhood or among society's outcasts. You must "make him visible" in your contact with political and diplomatic circles; you will succeed in doing this with your life witness rather than with the force of juridical or diplomatic arguments. You will be effective to the extent that those who

approach you will feel that they are discovering the liberating presence of the risen Christ in your words, in your attitude, and in your life.

In the future you will be traveling the highways of the world: always remember that you are at the service of the Successor of Peter and in a creative dialogue with the Pastors of the particular Churches in the countries where you are sent to carry out your mission. Take Christ with you. May Mary help you live his thoughts and sentiments intensely (cf. Phil 2,5-11). May my affectionate Blessing accompany you!

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