



The Holy See

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1. In these days, Europe is reaching another important landmark in its history: *10 new countries are entering the European Union*. Ten nations, which by culture and tradition were and felt European, are now to belong to this Union of States.

However, if the unity of the European peoples is to endure, *it cannot be merely economic and political*. As I had the opportunity to recall during my pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela in November 1982, if the soul of Europe is still united today, the reason is that *it refers to common human and Christian values*. The history of the formation of the European Nations keeps abreast with their evangelization. Consequently, despite the spiritual crises that have marked the life of the Continent in our day, its identity would be incomprehensible without Christianity.

2. For this very reason, the Church has made many contributions in recent years to the consolidation of Europe's cultural and spiritual unity, in particular with the Special Synods for Europe held respectively in 1990 and 1999. The vital sap of the Gospel can guarantee Europe a development that is consistent with its identity, in freedom and solidarity, in justice and peace. Only a Europe that does not eliminate but rediscovers its Christian roots, will be able to take up the challenges of the third millennium: peace, intercultural and interreligious dialogue, the safeguarding of creation.

All believers in Christ of the European West and East are required to make their own contribution through open and sincere ecumenical cooperation.

3. As I greet with affection the nations that are being welcomed into the European Union in these days, my thoughts go to the many Shrines, each one of which down the centuries has kept alive devotion to the Virgin Mary. Let us entrust the present and future of the Continent to Our Lady, Mother of Hope, and to the Saints whom we venerate as Patrons of Europe.

This morning in St Peter's Basilica, I ordained 26 new Priests. I renew my cordial greetings to them and to their relatives and friends. May they always be vivid images of the Good Shepherd among the People of God.

Today we are celebrating World Day of Prayer for Vocations. I extend a special thought to all who have set out on the path of formation for the priesthood and the consecrated life; and I invite you to pray that the Church will always have an abundance of holy vocations.

I wish everyone a good Sunday and a good beginning of this month of May, dedicated especially to Our Lady!

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