



The Holy See

HOLY MASS FOR THE FORMER STUDENTS OF
THE PONTIFICAL BELGIAN COLLEGE IN ROME

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

31 March 1979

Dear Friends,

The Eucharist we are celebrating together is the sign of particular unity with Christ, the one eternal Priest, who "entered once for all into the Holy Place, taking... his own blood" (Heb 9:12). The same Christ is always present in the Church "to the close of the age" (Mt 28:20). He dwells in her, gathering the people of God round the table of the Word and of the Eucharist. He dwells in her through our priestly service.

When we find ourselves around the altar in this way today, in this communion that we formed formerly at the Belgian College in Rome, our hearts are then filled with gratitude for the gift of the priestly vocation, because he has chosen us so that we may go and bear fruit (Jn 15: 16), because, entrusting his mysteries to us, he has entrusted to us men who have "redemption through his blood" (Eph 1:7). Looking at all that with the eyes of faith, we feel our worthlessness and we are always ready to repeat: "We are unworthy servants" (Lk 17:10.) We always feel, too, the greatness of God and we thank God for this gift. "O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good" (Ps 106, 1).

Today, we wish to address this gratitude to one another. The Lord wishes us to know how to be grateful to men, to look at our life from the point of view of the gifts received through men, our brothers. Thus, I would like today, with you, to look back on those years which gathered us within the walls of the old Belgian College, situated at 26 Via del Quirinale, in the neighbourhood of St Andrew's Church where St. Stanislaus Kostka, the Patron Saint of youth, died and rests.

Some thirty years separate us from that time. One might yield to the laws of time which bring us, among other things, to forgetfulness. But the voice of the heart is stronger, which asks us to keep things in our memory and think of them again with gratitude. Today we thank Christ who bestowed on us the grace of being together, in this important period of our lives, when we were still in the first years of our priesthood or preparing for it. "Ecce quam bonum et quam jucundum habitare fratres in unum": "Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!" (Ps 133, 1).

We thank God for having let us be brothers for one another, and our gratitude is also reciprocal among us. He let us live this brotherhood which unites men coming from different families, different nations, different continents, for that was how he gathered us then. We say: thanks for what each one was for the others at that time and for what everyone was for everyone. Thanks for the way we shared with others our qualities of intelligence, character and heart. Thanks for the place that the studies then in progress had, in this mutual exchange, as well as the apostolic and pastoral experiences in which each one of us was already engaged. Thanks for what sacred Rome was for us, as we learned to know it systematically as the capital of antiquity and the capital of Christendom. Thanks for what was the experience of Europe, of the world, of each of our countries, which were then picking themselves up after the sufferings of the second world war.

Let us think finally of what our Superiors were for us: our revered Rector, Cardinal de Furstenberg, who is present in our midst today; and also our Bishops who came to see us, who visited us at the College, as well as other ecclesiastics, the apostles of their time, such as Father Cardijn, not to mention the learned professors, the preachers of retreats, the directors of conscience: what have they been for us?

We want to speak of all that, in the first place, to Christ himself, beginning with this concelebration, this liturgy. And this concelebration permits us also to express ourselves to one another. We also wish to renew this spirit that we received through the "laying on of hands" (cf. 2 Tm 1:6), and this union of hearts, the secret of which the Lord himself knows. Amen!

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