



The Holy See

EUCCHARISTIC CONCELEBRATION
FOR THE CONCLUSION OF THE SECOND SPECIAL ASSEMBLY
FOR EUROPE OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Saturday, 23 October 1999

Most Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,

Dear Brothers and Sisters, 1. With this solemn Eucharistic concelebration, the Second Special Assembly for Europe of the Synod of Bishops comes to its conclusion. To you, almighty Father, for you, his Son our Redeemer, in you, Holy Spirit, we give thanks today. We also express our gratitude for the series of continental Synodal Assemblies, through which the Church has made an ample reflection during these years on the eve of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 for the coming of Christ into the world. A reason for renewed gratitude to divine Providence is also that opportunity given to us to encounter, to listen and to confront one another: in this way, we have deepened our mutual knowledge and have edified each other, especially thanks to the witness of those who, under the past totalitarian regimes, suffered hard and prolonged persecution for the faith. With gratitude to each one of you, venerable Brothers in the Episcopate whom I have encountered almost daily during these weeks of intense work, I make my own the psalmist's words: "As for the saints in the land, they are the noble, in whom is all my delight" (*Ps* 15: 3). Thank you with all my heart for the time and energies you have so generously spent for the good of the pilgrim Church in Europe. I would like to save a special word of gratitude for all those who collaborated in the organization of the Synod, offering their help to the Synod Fathers: our thoughts go in particular to the General Secretary and his co-workers, to the Presidents Delegate and to the General Rapporteur. I extend my deep gratitude to those who have had a part in the successful outcome of this important ecclesial event.

2. "*Jesus Christ of Nazareth ... crucified ... whom God raised from the dead*" (*Acts* 4: 10).

At the beginning of the Church, Peter's firm words echoed in Jerusalem: it was *kerygma*, the Christian announcement of salvation destined, by Christ's will, to all men and to all the peoples on earth. After 20 centuries, the Church presents herself at the threshold of the third millennium with this same announcement which constitutes her only treasure: Jesus Christ is the Lord; in him, and in no one else, there is salvation (cf. *Acts* 4: 12); He is the same yesterday, today, and for ever (cf. *Heb* 13: 8). This is the cry that comes from the hearts of the disciples of Emmaus, returning to Jerusalem after

meeting the Risen One. They listened to his ardent words and they recognized him in the breaking of the bread. This Synodal Assembly, the second for Europe, placed opportunely in the light of the biblical image of the disciples of Emmaus, closes in the sign of the joyous witness that comes from the experience of Christ, alive in his Church. The source of hope, for Europe and for the entire world, is Christ, the Word made Flesh, the only mediator between God and man. And the Church is the channel through which the wave of grace flows and spreads, coming from the pierced Heart of the Saviour.³ "Believe in God, believe also in me.... If you had known me, you would have known my Father also; henceforth you know him and have seen him" (*Jn* 14: 1, 7). With these words the Lord comforts our hope and invites us to look towards the heavenly Father. This year, the last of the century and of the millennium, the Church makes her own the disciples' invocation: "Lord, show us the Father" (*Jn* 14: 8), and receives Christ's comforting response: "he who has seen me has seen the Father ... I am in the Father and the Father is in me" (*Jn* 14: 9-10). Christ is the source of life and hope, because in him "in him the fullness of deity dwells" (*Col* 2: 9). In the human history of Jesus of Nazareth, the Transcendent entered into history, the Eternal into time, the Absolute into the precariousness of the human condition. Therefore with firm conviction the Church repeats to the men and women of the Year 2000 and in a special way to those living immersed in relativism and materialism: welcome Christ into your lives! Those who encounter him encounter Truth, discover Life, find the Way that leads to him (cf. *Jn* 14: 6; *Ps* 15: 11). Christ is man's future: "for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (*Acts* 4: 12).

4. This announcement of hope, this Good News is the heart of *evangelization*. It is ancient with regard to its essential nucleus, yet new with regard to the method and forms of its apostolic and missionary expression. Venerable Brothers, during the work of the Assembly that ends today, you have received the call that the Spirit addresses to the Churches in Europe committing them to face the new challenges. You have not feared to open your eyes to the reality of the continent, pointing out its lights as well as its shadows. Indeed faced with the problems of the present time, you have indicated useful orientations to make the face of Christ increasingly visible by a more incisive annunciation corroborated by a consistent witness. Light and comfort come, in this regard, *from the saints that spangle the history of the European Continent*. Our thoughts go, in the first place, to Sts Edith Stein, Bridget of Sweden and Catherine of Siena, whom I proclaimed co-patronesses of Europe at the beginning of this Synodal Assembly along with Sts Benedict, Cyril and Methodius. But how can we forget about the numerous children of the Church who, during these two millennia, lived a holiness no less generous and authentic in hiding, in family, professional and social life? And how can we not pay homage to the multitude of confessors of the faith and the many martyrs of this last century? All of them, like "living stones" adhering to Christ "the cornerstone", have built Europe as a spiritual and moral edifice, leaving a most precious inheritance to the future generations. The Lord Jesus promised: "he who believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I go to the Father" (*Jn* 14: 12). The saints are living proof of the fulfilment of this promise, and encourage the belief that this is possible in the most difficult hours of history.⁵ If we turn our gaze to the past centuries, we can only give thanks to the Lord because *in our continent Christianity has been a primary factor of unity among peoples and cultures* and of the integral promotion of man and his rights. If there have been attitudes and choices which unfortunately have sometimes gone in the opposite direction, at the time when we are preparing to pass through the Holy Door of the Great Jubilee (cf. *Incarnationis mysterium*, n. 11) we feel the need to humbly recognize our responsibilities. All Christians are requested to make this necessary discernment, so that with God's help, ever more united and reconciled they may hasten the coming of his kingdom. This fraternal cooperation is ever more urgent in the period we are going through, characterized by a *new phase in the process of European integration and by a strong evolution in a multi-ethnic and multicultural sense*. Regarding this, making my own the words

of the final Message of the Synod, I hope with you, venerable Brothers, that Europe in an attitude of creative faithfulness to its humanistic and Christian tradition, will guarantee the primacy of the ethical and spiritual values. This is a hope that "comes from the firm conviction that there can be no true and fertile unity for Europe if it is not built on its spiritual foundations".

6. Let us pray for this during this celebration. Invited by the responsorial psalm, we repeat: "*Show us, Lord, the way of life*" (response of the responsorial psalm). Lord, at every moment of life, show us the way. These words come to the believer's lips, especially now that the Second Special Assembly for Europe is about to end: Only you, Lord, can show us the way to take in order to offer the hope that does not disappoint our brothers and sisters of Europe. And we, Lord, will follow docilely. The iconographic tradition of the Christian East comes to aid us in our prayer, offering us an eloquent model of reference: it is the icon of the *Hodegetria*, Our Lady, "who shows the way". The Mother is pointing to the Son she carries in her arms and reminds Christians of all times and places that Christ is the path to follow. On her part, the Church, mirroring the icon, rediscovers in Mary, so to speak, herself and her own mission: *to indicate Christ to the world, the only path that leads to Life*. Mary, caring Mother of the Church, come to us and show us your Son. We hear the Blessed Virgin answer our trusting supplication, indicating Jesus and telling us as she did the servants of the wedding of Cana: "Do whatever he tells you" (*Jn 2: 5*). Keeping your gaze fixed on Christ, beloved brothers and sisters, return to your communities, strengthened by the knowledge that he lives in the Church, source of hope for Europe. Amen. © Copyright 1999 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana