



The Holy See

JUBILEE OF THE APOSTOLATE OF THE LAITY

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Sunday, 26 November 2000

1. *"It is you who say I am a king" (Jn 18: 37).*

This is how Jesus answered Pilate in a dramatic dialogue which the Gospel recounts to us again on today's Solemnity of Christ the King. On this day, celebrated at the end of the liturgical year, Jesus, the Eternal Word of the Father, is presented as the *beginning and end of all creation*, as the Redeemer of man and the Lord of history. In the first reading, the prophet Daniel says: "His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed" (7: 14).

Yes, O Christ, you are King! Your kingship is paradoxically manifested in the Cross, in obedience to the plan of the Father, "who", as the Apostle Paul wrote, "has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Col 1: 13-14). As the first born from the dead, you, Jesus, are *the King of the new humanity*, restored to its original dignity.

You are King! But your kingdom *is not of this world* (cf. Jn 18: 36); it is not the fruit of the conquests of war, political domination, economic empires or cultural hegemony. Yours is a "kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love and peace" (cf. *Preface of Christ the King*), which will be revealed in its fullness at the end of time, when God will be all in all (cf. 1 Cor 15: 28). The Church, which can already taste on earth the first fruits of this future fulfilment, never ceases to repeat: "*Adveniat regnum tuum*", "Thy kingdom come" (Mt 6: 10).

2. Thy kingdom come! This is how the faithful, in every part of the world, pray as they gather round their Pastors today for the *Jubilee of the Apostolate of the Laity*. And I joyfully add my voice to this universal chorus of praise and prayer, as I celebrate Holy Mass together with you at the tomb of the Apostle Peter.

I thank Cardinal James Francis Stafford, President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, and your two representatives, who expressed your common sentiments at the beginning of this Holy Mass. I greet my venerable Brothers in the

Episcopate, as well as the priests and religious present. I extend my greetings in particular to you, my lay brothers and sisters, *Christifideles laici*, who are actively dedicated to the Gospel cause: in looking at you, I am also thinking of all the members of the communities, associations and movements of apostolic action; I am thinking of the fathers and mothers who, with generosity and a spirit of sacrifice, see that their children are raised in the practice of human and Christian virtues; I am thinking of those who offer their sufferings, accepted and lived in union with Christ, as a contribution to evangelization.

3. I especially greet you, dear participants in the *Congress of the Catholic Laity*, which fits well into the context of the Jubilee of the Apostolate of the Laity. The theme of your meeting is "*Witnesses to Christ in the new millennium*". It continues the tradition of the world conventions of the lay apostolate which began 50 years ago under the fruitful impulse of the keener awareness which the Church had acquired both of her own nature as a mystery of communion and of her intrinsic missionary responsibility in the world.

In the growth of this awareness, *the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council marked a decisive turning-point*. With the Council *the hour of the laity* truly struck, and many lay faithful, men and women, more clearly understood their Christian vocation, which *by its very nature is a vocation to the apostolate* (cf. *Apostolicam actuositatem*, n. 2). Thirty-five years after its conclusion, I say: *we must return to the Council*. We must once again take the documents of the Second Vatican Council in hand to rediscover the great wealth of its doctrinal and pastoral motives.

In particular, *you lay people* must again take those documents in hand. To you the Council opened extraordinary perspectives of commitment and involvement in the Church's mission. Did the Council not remind you of your participation in the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ? In a special way, the Council Fathers entrusted you with the mission "of seeking the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God's will" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 31).

Since then *a lively season of associations* has blossomed, in which, along with traditional groups, new movements, sodalities and communities have arisen (cf. *Christifideles laici*, n. 29). Today more than ever, dear brothers and sisters, *your apostolate is indispensable*, if the Gospel is to be the light, salt and leaven of a new humanity.

4. However, what does this mission entail? *What does being a Christian mean today, here and now?*

Being a Christian has never been easy, nor is it easy today. Following Christ demands the courage of radical choices, which often means going against the stream. "We are Christ!", St Augustine exclaimed. The *martyrs and witnesses of faith yesterday and today, including many lay faithful*, show that, if necessary, we must not hesitate to give even our lives for Jesus Christ.

In this regard, the Jubilee invites everyone to a serious examination of conscience and lasting spiritual renewal for ever more effective missionary activity. Here I would like to return to what my venerable predecessor, Pope Paul VI, wrote in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi* 25 years ago towards the end of the Holy Year of 1975: "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses" (n. 41).

These words are still valid today in the presence of a humanity full of potential and expectations, but threatened by a multitude of snares and dangers. One need only think, among other things, of social advances and of the revolution in genetics; of economic progress and of underdevelopment in vast areas of the globe; of the tragedy of hunger in the world and of the difficulties in safeguarding peace; of the extensive network of communications and of the dramas of loneliness and violence reported in the daily press. Dear lay faithful, as witnesses to Christ you are especially called *to bring the light of the Gospel to the vital nerve centres of society*. You are called to be prophets of Christian hope and apostles of the One "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty!" (Rv 1: 4).

5. "*Holiness befits your house!*" (Ps 92: 5). With these words we addressed God in the responsorial psalm. *Holiness* continues to be *the greatest challenge* for believers. We must be grateful to the Second Vatican Council, which recalled how *all Christians are called to the fullness of Christian life* and the perfection of charity.

Dear friends, *do not be afraid to take up this challenge: be holy men and women!* Do not forget that the fruits of the apostolate depend on the depth of spiritual life, on the intensity of prayer, on continual formation and on sincere adherence to the Church's directives. Today I repeat to you, as I did to the young people during the recent World Youth Day, that if you are what you should be - that is, if you live Christianity without compromise - you will set the world ablaze.

You face tasks and goals which may seem to exceed human forces. Do not lose heart! "He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion" (Phil 1: 6) Always keep your gaze fixed on Jesus. Make him the heart of the world.

And you, Mary, Mother of the Redeemer, his first and most perfect disciple, help us to be his witnesses in the new millennium. Let your Son, King of the world and King of history, reign over our lives, our communities and the whole world!

"Praise and honour to you, O Christ!". By your Cross you have redeemed the world. At the beginning of the millennium, we entrust to you our efforts to serve this world which you love and which we love too. Support us with the power of your grace! Amen.

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