



The Holy See

OPENING OF THE ACADEMIC YEAR OF ECCLESIASTICAL UNIVERSITIES

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Friday 25 October 2002

1. *"Lord, this is the people that longs to see your face"* (cf. Ps 23[24],6).

The words we have sung as the refrain to the responsorial psalm acquire a special meaning today, in this Basilica. Indeed, the rectors, professors and students of the Roman ecclesiastical universities have gathered here for the traditional celebration at the start of the new academic year.

I extend my cordial greetings to everyone. In a special way, I want to thank Cardinal Zenon Grocholewski, who is presiding at the Eucharistic celebration, and his collaborators for the work they do every day at the Congregation for Catholic Education.

2. Turning my gaze to you, dear brothers and sisters, with gratitude I reflect: Here, Lord, "this is the people that longs to see your face". In fact, what is the *study of theology* other than a particular way of *seeking [to see] God's face*? The dedication to the other *branches of knowledge* that are taught in your universities: what else is it but the approach to the reality of man, of the Church, of history, in which God reveals himself and his unfathomable mystery of salvation?

"The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein" (Ps 23 [24],1). From whatever perspective he approaches reality, the believer knows he is moving "on holy ground" (cf. Ex 3,5), because there is nothing positive within or outside man which does not in some way reflect divine wisdom. *"O Lord, our Lord, how great is your name through all the earth!"* (Ps 8,2.10).

3. The Gospel passage just proclaimed speaks to us of *two levels of "wisdom"*: a first level

consists in the ability to "interpret the countenance of the earth and of the heavens" (Lk 12,56), that is, to grasp the connections between cause and effect in natural phenomena. At another level, a deeper one, we find the ability to judge the "time" in which the history of salvation develops, the time in which God works and awaits the collaboration of the human person.

In "the fullness of time", St Paul recalls (Gal 4,4), *God sent his Only-begotten Son*. John the Evangelist observes that he "came to his own home, and his own people received him not" (Jn 1,11). The presence of the incarnate Word imparts a unique quality to time: *he makes it "decisive"*, in the sense that in it the eternal destiny of each person and of all humanity is decided. The greatest gift of God must be matched by the greatest responsibility of man.

4. Christ's criticism of the crowd can be applied to our time, in which humanity has developed a very skilful ability to analyze and interpret phenomena in a certain sense "on the surface", but tends to avoid the deeper questions about ultimate meanings, the meaning of life and death, of the good and evil of history.

The stinging rebuke: "*Hypocrites!*" (Lk 12,56), coming from Jesus' lips, says clearly that it is not so much a question of *not knowing how to judge* what is just (cf. Lk 12,57), but of *not wanting to accept it*. Hypocrisy thus consists in a *false wisdom* which is pleased with so much knowledge but very careful not to be committed to facing weighty questions of a religious and moral nature.
Synthesis of gift of truth and concrete way of life

5. Today's first reading from the Letter of St Paul to the Ephesians presents a *wonderful synthesis between faith and life*, between theology and evangelical wisdom: it is the perspective of *unity*. It is nourished by several virtues that the Apostle lists: humility, meekness, patience, mutual tolerance in love (cf. Eph 4,2). Paul's moral exhortation is entirely based on *contemplation of the mystery* and its *translation in the concrete way of life* of community members.

The antidote to hypocrisy is therefore a *constant circularity* between what is known and what is lived, between the message of truth received as a gift in the Christian vocation and concrete personal and community attitudes. In other words, between *knowledge of the faith* and *holiness of life*.

6. These reflections, inspired by the Word of God, especially challenge those who are involved in the ecclesiastical universities. Teachers and students are called to exercise constant attention to interpret the signs of the times *in relation to the central Sign* of divine Revelation, Christ the Lord.

They are particularly called to put themselves *at the service of the unity of the Church*. This unity, open by its nature to the Catholic dimension, here in Rome finds the ideal environment to be believed, studied and served.

Dear brothers and sisters, the unity of the ecclesial Body is preserved and built up through the bond of peace in truth and in charity (cf. Eph 4,3). For this reason, it is necessary that your universities should be *places of authentic Christian wisdom*, in which each person is personally committed to creating a coherent synthesis between faith and life, between the content of his studies and his practical behaviour.

May *the Saints* teach you this, especially the Doctors of the Church and those who spent their lives studying and teaching. They are the "people who long to see the face [of God]" (Ps 23 [24],6) in the loftiest sense; and precisely because they were passionate contemplators of God's face, they also knew how to transmit to others the bright reflections of truth, beauty and goodness that flow from it.

May the Blessed Virgin Mary, Seat of Wisdom, always watch over your academic communities and over each one of you. May she obtain from the Holy Spirit, an abundance of wisdom, knowledge and intelligence for you so that, as St Paul says in his Letter to the Ephesians, you may be able to "comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses all understanding, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God" (Eph 3,18-19).

Amen!

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