



The Holy See

XXV ANNIVERSARY OF THE PONTIFICATE

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Thursday, 16 October 2003 **Address of Card. Ratzinger at the beginning of Thanksgiving Mass**¹. "*Misericordias Domini in aeternum cantabo* - I will sing of your mercies, O Lord, for ever (cf. Ps 89[88]: 1). Twenty-five years ago I had a special experience of divine mercy. At the Conclave, through the College of Cardinals, Christ said to me, as he once said to Peter by the Lake of Genesaret: "*Tend my sheep*" (Jn 21: 16). I heard echo in my soul the question he addressed to Peter at that moment: "*Do you love me? Do you love me more than these...?*" (cf. Jn 21: 15-16). Humanly speaking, how could I not have been apprehensive? How could so great a responsibility not burden me? I had to turn to divine mercy in order to answer the question "Do you accept?" with confidence: "In the obedience of the faith, before Christ my Lord, entrusting myself to the Mother of Christ and of the Church, aware of the great difficulties, I accept". Today, dear brothers and sisters, I am pleased to share with you an experience that has now lasted for a quarter of a century. Every day that same dialogue between Jesus and Peter takes place in my heart. In spirit, I focus on the benevolent gaze of the risen Christ. Although he knows of my human frailty, he encourages me to answer confidently, like Peter: "*Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you*" (Jn 21: 17). And then he invites me to take on the responsibilities that he himself has entrusted to me.² "*The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep*" (Jn 10: 11). While Jesus was saying these words, the Apostles did not realize that he was referring to himself. Not even his beloved Apostle John knew it. He understood on Calvary, at the foot of the Cross, when he saw Jesus silently giving up his life for "his sheep". When the time came for John and the other Apostles to assume this same mission they then remembered his words. They realized that they would be able to fulfil their mission only because he had assured them that he himself would be working among them. As Peter, a "*witness of the sufferings of Christ*" (I Pt 5: 1), was particularly aware of this, he admonished the elders of the Church: "*Tend the flock of God that is your charge*" (I Pt 5: 2). Down the centuries, the successors of the Apostles, guided by the Holy Spirit, have continued to gather Christ's flock and lead it toward the Kingdom of Heaven, knowing that only "for Christ, with Christ and in Christ" could they assume so great a responsibility. I was conscious of the same thing when the Lord called me to carry out Peter's mission in this beloved city of Rome and at the service of the whole world. From the beginning of my Pontificate, my thoughts, prayers and actions were motivated by one desire: to witness that Christ, the Good Shepherd, is present and active in his Church. He is constantly searching for every stray sheep, to lead it back to the sheepfold, to bind up its wounds; he tends the sheep that are weak and sickly and protects those that are strong. This is why, from the very first day, I have never ceased to urge people: "Do not be afraid to welcome Christ and accept his power!" (*Homily at the Mass Inaugurating the Pontifical Ministry of John Paul II*, 22 October 1978, *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 2 November 1978, p. 12). Today I forcefully repeat: "Open, indeed, open wide the doors to

Christ!" (cf. *ibid.*). Let him guide you! Trust in his love!³ When I was beginning my Pontificate I appealed to all: "Help the Pope and all who wish to serve Christ and with Christ's power to serve the human person and the whole of mankind!". As I thank God with you for these 25 years totally steeped in his mercy, I feel a special need to express my gratitude to you too, brothers and sisters of Rome and of the whole world, who have responded and continue to respond in various ways to my request for help. Only God knows what sacrifices, prayers and sufferings have been offered to sustain me in my service to the Church. How much kindness and concern, how many signs of communion have surrounded me each day. May the good Lord reward everyone generously!! I implore you, dear brothers and sisters, do not stop your great work of love for the Successor of Peter. I ask you once again: help the Pope, whoever wants to serve Christ, to serve man and all humanity!⁴ **T**o you, Lord Jesus Christ,

The one Pastor of the Church

I offer the fruit of these 25 years of ministry
at the service of the people you have entrusted to my care.

Forgive the evil done and multiply the good:

All is your work and you alone deserve glory.

With full confidence in your mercy

I commend to you, again today, those whom years ago
you entrusted to my pastoral care.

Keep them in love, gather them into your sheepfold,

take the weak upon your shoulders,

bind up the wounded, take care of the strong.

Be their Shepherd, so that they do not stray.

Protect the beloved Church which is in Rome
and the Churches of the whole world.

Instil the light and power of your Spirit

in those you have chosen to guide your flock:

May they carry out their mission enthusiastically

as guides, teachers and sanctifiers,

while they await your glorious return.

I renew to you, through the hands of the Beloved Mother, Mary,

the gift of myself, of the present and of the future:

May all be done according to your will.

Supreme Pastor, stay with us,

so that with you we may safely journey onwards

to the house of the Father,

to the house of the Father. Amen!

At the conclusion of the Thanksgiving Mass for the 25th Anniversary of his Pontificate the Holy Father spoke briefly to the pilgrims and visitors present: Before ending the celebration, I would like to offer my cordial greeting to everyone present, thanking in particular the *numerous pilgrimages*, from Italy, Poland and from other countries.

I greet the Cardinals with a special thought for Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Dean of the Sacred College, whom I thank for his affectionate words. Likewise I extend my fraternal greeting to the many Bishops present. I greet the diocesan community of Rome, gathered here with the Cardinal Vicar of Rome, the Auxiliary Bishops and the parish priests. I greet with respect the Heads of State, especially the President of Italy, Hon. Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, whom I thank for the courteous greetings and good wishes addressed to me yesterday evening in a special television message. I also greet the President of Poland and all the authorities and representatives of various Italian and international institutions. I thank all those, in so many parts of the earth, who support my daily apostolic ministry with prayer and with the offering of their sufferings. *The Holy Father then thanked the pilgrims in French, English, German, Spanish, Portuguese, Belarusian and Polish. To the English-speaking faithful he said: Thank you for the affection which you have shown toward the Successor of Peter. The Holy Father ended in Italian: Thank you to everyone. May the Lord bless you!* © Copyright 2003 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana