



The Holy See

***LETTER OF JOHN PAUL II
TO CARDINAL JOSEPH RATZINGER
ON THE 50th ANNIVERSARY
OF HIS ORDINATION TO THE PRIESTHOOD***

*To my venerable Brother Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger
Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith*

With deep joy, Your Eminence, I offer you my warm congratulations and most fervent good wishes on the happy event of the 50th anniversary of your ordination to the priesthood. The coincidence of your Jubilee day with the liturgical solemnity of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul reminds me of their vision of broad spiritual and ecclesial horizons: personal holiness extended to the supreme sacrifice, missionary outreach combined with constant concern for unity, the necessary integration of spiritual charism and institutional ministry.

These are horizons, Venerable Brother, which you have attentively explored in your theological research: in Peter, the principle of unity is outstanding, founded on faith as firm as the rock of the Princes of the Apostles; in Paul, the need, intrinsic in the Gospel, to call every man and every people to the obedience of faith. Moreover these two dimensions are combined in the common witness of holiness which sealed the generous dedication of the two Apostles to the service of the immaculate Bride of Christ. How can we not also see in these two elements the fundamental features of the path that Providence prepared for you, Your Eminence, in calling you to the priesthood?

Your brilliant philosophical and, in particular, theological studies and your precocious call to teaching roles in the most important German universities should be seen in this perspective of faith. You expressed the intention that has always guided you in your commitment to study and teaching in the motto you chose on the occasion of your episcopal appointment: *Cooperatores veritatis*.

The aim for which you have always striven since your very first years as a priest has been to serve the truth, seeking to know it ever more thoroughly and make it ever more widely known.

It was precisely the consideration of this pastoral aspiration which has constantly marked your academic activity that induced Pope Paul VI of venerable memory to raise you to the episcopal dignity and entrust you with responsibility for the great Archdiocese of München und Freising. It was a crucial transition in your life, which was to give a direction to later developments. Indeed when, shortly afterwards, the unforgettable Pontiff mentioned above created you a Cardinal, you found yourself directly bound to collaborating with the Apostolic See. Twenty years ago I asked you to collaborate full time as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Since then you have not ceased to expend your intellectual and moral energies in promoting and protecting the doctrine of the faith and its morals throughout the Catholic world (cf. Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus*, n. 48), while encouraging studies aimed at increasing knowledge of the faith so that the new problems arising from the progress of science and civilization could be conveniently answered in the light of the Word of God (cf. *ibid.*, n. 49).

In this office, Your Eminence, the Apostles Peter and Paul have inspired your priestly life and your ecclesial service further and in the loftiest way. This happy event is a favourable opportunity for me to reiterate my deep gratitude to you for the impressive volume of work you have carried out and directed in the dicastery entrusted to you, and even more, for the spirit of humility and self-denial that has constantly marked your activity. May the Lord lavish his rewards upon you!

On this occasion which is so significant for you, I would like to tell you that the spiritual communion you have always shown with regard to the Successor of Peter has been a great comfort to me in the daily effort of my service to Christ and to the Church. I therefore pray the Lord, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, for the choicest heavenly favours for you, for your ministry and for all your loved ones, as I impart a special heartfelt Apostolic Blessing to you with a fraternal sentiment of affection.

From the Vatican, 20 June 2002, the 21st year of the Pontificate.

JOHN PAUL II