



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE COMMUNITY OF THE PONTIFICAL
NORTH AMERICAN COLLEGE**

Monday, 15 October 1984

Dear Brothers in Christ,

1. I know that the occasion of our meeting today is one that has great meaning for all of you, the alumni and students of the Pontifical North American College. It is the 125th Anniversary of the founding of your College! At the same time, the event that you are celebrating in Rome has *profound significance for the whole Church in the United States*; it has a deep bearing on a long period in the history of your country.

Today is truly a day for *reflection*, for *gratitude*, and for *the rededication of yourselves* to the service of God's people in America.

2. In your reflecting you will surely be thinking about the meaning that the College has for you and for the Church. It immediately becomes clear that the reason for the existence of the College, and its destiny, are forever linked to the mystery of *the ministerial priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ*. The College was founded at a given moment in your nation's history and in circumstances greatly different from those of our own day, and yet its purpose remains the same: to help young men prepare for the priesthood. The Graduate Division at Casa Santa Maria, as well as the Institute for Continuing Theological Education, are likewise related to the same mystery of faith, as they assist priests to exercise their ministry in a particular service to the Church in America. And all the training and formation received take place within the context of a *National College in Rome*.

For you this involves many things. It means having the advantage of living in a *community* either of priests or seminarians, and having access to the *scholarship* available in or through the Roman universities.

It means being witnesses, day after day, of the living tradition of the faith as it is proclaimed in the See of Peter. Your situation permits you to live the supernatural reality of *communion with the Church of Rome* and with the Bishop of Rome. And in the ecclesial experience of this communion, you enter into yet another reality: you experience *communion with all those who are themselves in communion with the Church of Rome*.

To be a student at your College is to be a privileged participant - even if to a modest degree - in an *immensely vital exchange* between the local Churches in the United States and the universal Church.

Each of you brings to Rome a lived experience of faith and grace, which - when combined with the lived experiences of other individuals of the same culture and other cultures - constitutes *a great enriching contribution* to the Church which all Christianity reveres as "Mother of all the Churches". Through her, moreover, you place your talents, your prayerful insights, and all the generosity of your hearts at the service of *the universal Church*.

And in this act of ecclesial communion, which by its nature must be open to the whole Body of Christ, *you yourselves are enriched* by the See of Peter and confirmed in ecclesial communion with all the other particular Churches, whose identity is recognized, protected and guaranteed by the Bishop of Rome. And your personal enrichment there-upon becomes *a gift* that you are charged to take back *to your people*, so that they too may increasingly progress in the experience of Catholicity.

As you reflect together here in this City on the reality which you have lived in past years, or are now living as students, you can see that you are in an excellent position to be individual and corporate *witnesses* before all your brothers and sisters in your local Churches of *the great mystery of the Church's unity* manifested in legitimate diversity, lived in oneness of faith and consummated in self-sacrificing love.

Dear brothers: these are the values to which your presence today bears witness. You have come to proclaim *your adherence to the Catholic priesthood* within the mystery of the Church. You have come to profess with all the energy of your being that you believe in *the unity of the Body of Christ* as it exists in your local Churches, precisely because they are Catholic, unite you in the communion of the universal Church. And, yes, I believe that you have come - your hearts filled with that special love acquired in Rome - in order "to visit Cephas" (*Gal. 1, 18*), to show your support for the office and person of the Roman Pontiff, and, with the Second Vatican Council, to profess the faith of the Church according to which, as Successor of Peter, he is "the perpetual and visible source and foundation of the unity of the Bishops and of the multitude of the faithful" (*Lumen Gentium*, 23). And be assured, dear brothers, that your act of faith and witness of love have great value for the life of the Church and for the effectiveness of your ministry, and that they are *deeply appreciated by me*.

3. Your anniversary celebration is likewise a day for *giving thanks*. The memories of your past must express themselves in gratitude: gratitude *to the pioneers of your College*; to those who led the way at the time of its founding by Pius IX, and sustained the burdens of its inception and growth; to all who helped to form you in the mystery of Christ. In the words of the Letter to the Hebrews: "Remember your leaders who spoke the word of God to you; consider how their lives ended, and imitate their faith" (*Hebr. 13, 7*).

A debt of gratitude is owed *to the Bishops of the United States* for the pastoral insight and generosity that has inspired them to maintain the North American College throughout the years, and for their devoted interest, encouragement and support. The Holy See joins you, the alumni and students, as you express your own deep thanks to the Hierarchy of your country.

In your reflection you will also certainly recall all your *fellow students*, living and dead, who in the bond of friendship did so much by their fraternal charity and their individual and corporate example to help you to be faithful to the Gospel ideals of the priesthood of Jesus Christ. This too is a debt that can be sufficiently repaid only in prayer. At the same time you must preserve for the future of your College the strength that is found in fraternal support and in mutual unassuming spiritual edification: "Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity" (*Ps. 133, 1*).

Your celebration is, above all, an occasion *to offer thanks to God* for everything that he has accomplished through the North American College as an instrument of his grace during the past century and a quarter. Generations of priests have been formed in the likeness of Christ through the action of the Holy Spirit. A great band of apostles has been sent forth to preach the Gospel in the United States and to build up in charity, justice and truth the community of the faithful. It is an hour to render thanks for all the blessings given to the Church in the United States through your providential institution. It is a time to render thanks to the Most Holy Trinity for *hundreds of vocations* to the priesthood, nourished and sustained by the Eucharist, the Sacrament of Penance and the word of God, and protected in the constant Christian struggle against sin by the loving care of the Immaculate Virgin Mary.

4. And finally, in the midst of your celebrations it is entirely fitting that you should *rededicate yourselves to the ministry of the sacred priesthood*. Together with Mary, Mother of Jesus and Mother of all Priests, continue *to listen to the saving word of God*, to embrace it in your own lives so that you may faithfully and effectively proclaim its fullness, within the unity of the Church. For the honor of your College and for the needs of your homeland, renew the offering of your lives to Jesus Christ, the Son of God and High Priest of the New Testament. His priesthood must remain the ideal of your youth, the center of your lives and the joy of your hearts.

Dear brothers: as you reflect and give thanks, and as you rededicate yourselves for what lies ahead, remember always: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever" (*Hebr. 13, 8*). It is to him that your lives belong. He alone fully explains the past history, present existence and

future destiny of the Pontifical North American College. And it is in his love that *you must be steadfast*, in order to serve God's people in America: the heart of each one of you *steadfast* forever in his love, according to the motto of your College: *Firmum est cor meum!*

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