



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II ON OCCASION OF THE BEATIFICATION OF BLESSED NIELS STENSEN

Saturday, 22 October 1988

Truly, Blessed Niels Stensen is a part of your history, a part of the spiritual heritage which nourishes your lives, whether you are aware of it or not. The most meaningful veneration of this new Beatus of the Church would be for you to imitate in your own lives one or other of the many positive aspects of his exemplary life.

In front of the University Library in Copenhagen there is a bronze statue of Niels Stensen. It bears the inscription: "Anatom - Begründer der Geologie - Knecht Gottes" (Anatomist - Founder of Geology - Knight of God). His life followed a double course: he was a keen observer of the human body and of inanimate nature, and at the same time he was a deeply believing Christian who placed himself at the service of God's will in a humble, decisive and fearless way. The inscription calls him a "Knight of God" - in other words, God's servant; and in this way connects him with the "Servant of God" of the Old Testament, with that title of the Messiah which was fully realized in our Lord Jesus Christ. Niels Stensen, a servant of God which means that through his life and actions, through his fidelity and perseverance, he became similar to the Lord himself. In this way he is an example and an inspiration for us all: for this we implore his help and intercession.

Allow me to draw attention briefly to some aspects of the life of this great Christian of the seventeenth century, aspects which should penetrate our hearts as questions put to our consciences. With method and rigour, Niels Stensen investigated the laws which govern our biological life and also some areas of inanimate nature. In the course of these studies he openly and sincerely corrected himself and his colleagues regarding ideas until then in vogue, whenever deeper investigation showed them to be wrong. Will we be ready, like Niels Stensen, to acknowledge without prejudice the order of nature and to respect its laws, without deifying it or closing our eyes to it in fear? Do we use the numerous instruments that technology places at our

disposal according to their proper laws and scope? Do we respect their limit? And in relation to our bodies, while we would all like to keep good health, do we also observe what doctors and scientists tell us about following a healthy way of living, avoiding abuses or exaggerations?

But Niels Stensen challenges us above all as a European, a believer, a Christian, a convert, a pastor of souls and a missionary. With the evangelical language of the heart, this famous son of Denmark found his way to Amsterdam, to Leyden, to Paris and to Florence, his second homeland. His ministry as a Bishop led him to Hannover, Münster, Hamburg and Schwerin. In all these places he was a witness to the same truth, the same science, the same will of God. In all these places his encounter was with the human person, the most dramatic and wonderful creature on earth. Do we too look at present day efforts to bring about European unity in such a perspective, or are we concerned merely with the economics of marketing and free trade? And as regards our personal lives: as Christians, baptized perhaps when very young, are you ready to strive for an ever deeper and more mature faith, which might even lead to a radical change of life, as Stensen experienced in his conversion, in his ordination as priest and bishop, in abandoning his scientific activities for the sake of the kingdom of God?

These are some of the ways in which the clear and demanding voice of the new *Beatus* can reach us even today, if we are prepared to confront our lives with his example. Perhaps this has already happened to some of you in the course of your preparation for this joyous Beatification: it will happen more intensely during these solemn days. But this is a task to be pursued throughout life.

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