



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS  
POPE JOHN PAUL II  
TO THE CARDINALS, PAPAL HOUSEHOLD AND ROMAN CURIA**

*Monday, 22 December 1997*

1. "The life of Christ is not an exhibition of over-ruling power. Its glory is for those who can discern it, and not for the world. Its power lies in its absence of force. It has the decisiveness of a supreme ideal, and that is why the history of the world divides at this point of time" (Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*, p. 57).

These words of Whitehead, a modern non-Catholic thinker with no apparent formal links with any Christian Church, can excellently describe the meaning of today's meeting that takes place on the eve of the Christmas holidays as we rapidly advance towards the end of the second Christian millennium.

Referring to the philosopher's words, can we not describe ourselves as people striving to discern the true meaning of Christ's glory? Are we not convinced that his life "is not an exhibition of overruling power ... not for the world", but that "its power lies in its absence of force"? Indeed, we can say of ourselves that we have actually yielded to this "power" of Christ, and that we have followed it in the name "of a supreme ideal", seeking to fulfil in the Church our vocation as Bishops, priests, religious and lay people, so wonderfully explained by the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council.

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate, dear brothers and sisters, divine Providence has called you to render this extraordinary service to the Apostolic See, a service which has great importance for the universal Church since it brings you into a very close relationship with the "ministerium petrinum" of the Bishop of Rome. I would like today, with all my heart, to express my deep gratitude to you, the Cardinal Dean, for the courteous and affectionate words of devotion and good wishes you have addressed to me on behalf of the great family of the Roman Curia. My gratitude

is extended to you all, Cardinals, Archbishops, Bishops, priests, religious and lay people, invaluable collaborators of the Apostolic See: I hope that everyone will feel it an honour and a reward to be called to serve Christ himself and his work of redemption in the heart of the Church.

2. Christ is the point where "the history of the world divides". With these words Whitehead in a way suggests why the Church is preparing to celebrate the Year 2000 with special solemnity. She has only just set out on the second phase of her three-year itinerary to the Great Jubilee in which she intends to commemorate the event that changed history 2,000 years ago. In this perspective, every believer is preparing joyfully to renew his profession of faith in the mystery of the Incarnation of the Word.

Thanks to the efforts of the Central Committee for the Great Jubilee and of the national and diocesan committees, throughout the world many praiseworthy initiatives have been started, so that the imminent Holy Year may be a time of grace and reconciliation. In the Diocese of Rome, after the celebration of the Synod, the City Mission is being undertaken in order to prepare for the Jubilee; it involves the Christian communities in the task of bringing the Gospel message to the families and the milieus of work and life. As I renew my appreciation of this initiative, I am very moved in remembering Cardinal Ugo Poletti, called to his eternal reward last February. As I opened the Diocesan Synod of Rome, he was beside me, giving this city fresh missionary zeal.

The many commitments awaiting us so that we properly prepare the Holy Year celebrations must not lead us to forget that the Jubilee is above all a great gift which the Lord makes to all humanity through the Church: a grace that should be received by believers with faith and interior conversion. It is a deeply spiritual event, and this must also guide the necessary organizational aspects. May the Holy Spirit, to whom this second year of preparation is dedicated, enable the Churches and Christians to be kindly disposed to the Lord's guests, so as to receive the full grace of the Jubilee event.

3. "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations" (Mt 28:19). Missionary zeal, which the proximity of the third millennium is reviving in the whole of God's family, had some significant moments during the Apostolic Visits which the Lord allowed me to complete this year.

How can we forget my long-desired visit to Sarajevo, the city symbolizing the contradictions and hopes of the century now ending? Or my visit to the Czech Republic, where I had the joy of taking part in the celebrations for the Millennium of St Adalbert, the great evangelizer of the peoples of Central Europe?

Another long-awaited visit was the one to the Lebanon, where I joyfully traveled to close the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, bringing a word of encouragement and hope to everyone sincerely seeking a future of dialogue and peace. I was then able to return to my homeland to take part in the International Eucharistic Congress in Wrocław and to give thanks to

the Lord for the gift of the Christian faith proclaimed 1,000 years ago to the people of Poland and of neighbouring Bohemia by the great Bishop St Adalbert. On that occasion, I also had the joy of celebrating the 600th anniversary of the foundation of the "Alma Mater" where I was both student and lecturer, the Jagellonian University of Kraków, an authentic beacon of civilization and culture for all Poland.

In the second half of the year I took part in the 12th World Youth Day in Paris, and later, in Rio de Janeiro, in the Second World Meeting of Families: two events separated by great distance but linked by a single faith and the same missionary commitment.

I recall with deep feeling the young people from the five continents who at Longchamp enthusiastically expressed their love of Christ and their joy in proclaiming him on the paths of the world. I was then able to have a similar experience in Bologna, together with thousands of young people who had gathered there to celebrate the Italian National Eucharistic Congress.

What can I say, then, of the unforgettable days I spent in Brazil on the occasion of the Second World Meeting of Families? Thanks to the generous efforts of the Pontifical Council for the Family and of the Archdiocese of Rio de Janeiro, this event gave a renewed impetus to the family apostolate and was an opportunity to proclaim the values of the family and of life as privileged ways for building up humanity's hope.

I entrust to the Lord the apostolic pilgrimages which, if it pleases him, I shall have the joy of making in 1998, first of which is my Pastoral Visit to Cuba in January.

4. "I proclaim a great joy to you ... today a Saviour is born who is Christ the Lord" (Lk 2:11).

The inspiring atmosphere of the Christmas holidays reminds us that the Church's priority task is to bring people the Good News of the Lord. The Church fulfils this task by proclaiming in every time and circumstance the truth that liberates and saves: Jesus Christ, the Son of God made man.

This year, a particular element of this service to the truth was the publication in Latin of the "editio typica" of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, a privileged tool for integrally and systematically transmitting the message of salvation. But what occurred last October when I included among the Doctors of the Church the young Carmelite of Lisieux, St Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face, was also a service to Gospel truth. With her "little way", she opened to countless souls a simple, though demanding, path to perfection, and reminded a world increasingly tempted by indifference that the Christian life is the convergence of doctrine and practice, of truth and life; that it is above all an encounter with a God who is close and merciful, and who urges us to love everyone, without reservation and without counting the cost.

5. The Church is called to put herself at the service of the Gospel in many ways, while being

attentive to historical changes. The Apostle Paul understood this well when he said: "I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (1 Cor 9:22). The evangelizing mission spurs the Church to be concerned and attentive to human tragedies and problems, to collaborate in achieving a just peace and to defend the rights of the weakest, who are often the innocent victims of the great contradictions of our time. Her constant programme is to give a voice to those who have no voice, accompanying her activity with concrete signs of solidarity and fraternal love.

The Church's commitment to the poor in all latitudes of the earth is made particularly concrete in the daily work and generosity of missionaries. This year too, some of them were called to bear witness to the greatest love, suffering martyrdom for the cause of the Gospel. In this context of preferential love for the "little", I recall here with affection and gratitude Mother Teresa of Calcutta, whom the Lord called to himself after a life of total dedication to serving the "poorest of the poor". Her exceptional witness of prayer, of total devotion to the least ones and of love for the Church remains for believers and nonbelievers a legacy to be welcomed and appreciated.

6. The birth of the Redeemer, who came "to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad" (Jn 11:52), spurs all who belong to him by virtue of the one Baptism to continue on the path to full unity. With her eyes turned to the mystery of the manifestation of "the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour" (cf. Ti 3:4-7), the Church has also continued this year to advance on the path of ecumenism. The preparation for the Great Jubilee and the desire, widespread among many Christians, to overcome the causes of division which accumulated during the second millennium, have given rise to numerous ecumenical encounters and projects.

I would particularly like to recall the meeting with His Holiness Aram I Keshishian, the Catholicos of Cilicia for Armenians, with whom we reaffirmed our common faith in Jesus Christ, true God and true man, over and above age-old misunderstandings, together with our common commitment to serve Christian unity in the theological, cultural and pastoral fields. Another moment on the ecumenical journey was the meeting with the Chapter of Canterbury Cathedral, on the occasion of the 14th centenary of the mission entrusted to St Augustine and his companions by Pope St Gregory the Great.

In addition, the Holy See was represented at the Second European Ecumenical Assembly held in Graz from 23 to 29 June, which saw 700 delegates of the various Christian Churches of Europe reflect together on the theme "Reconciliation, a Gift of God and a Source of New Life", in order to reaffirm their desire to make a common contribution to the spiritual dimension of Europe and, after centuries of divisions, to achieve the Christian unity so greatly desired.

7. The Special Assembly for America of the Synod of Bishops has just ended. It saw gathered together for the first time representatives of the entire continent's Episcopates and of the Roman Curia. The common reflection on the great human and spiritual riches and on the sometimes tragic

contradictions present in the "New World" led the Synod Fathers to identify the current approaches to evangelization and reconciliation in order to respond to the continent's challenges. Fidelity to the authentic teaching of the Church, the rediscovery of the different vocations and ministries and the commitment to their interaction, the defence of human life from conception to its natural end, the primary role of families in society, the commitment to make society compatible with Christ's teachings, the value of human work and the proclamation of the Gospel in the world of culture have been identified as the basic ways to renew the Church's mission throughout the continent. I hope that from such a great spiritual and pastoral grace new solidarity and new understanding will be born among believers and the peoples of America.

The rediscovery of ecumenism and the Church's synodal dimension is the fruit of the greatest ecclesial event of our century: the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, which appears increasingly as the ideal "holy door" for the Great Jubilee of the Holy Year 2000.

In the immense work of "updating" the Church under the banner of a twofold fidelity to God and to man, which that historical meeting promoted, my venerable Predecessor Paul VI, the centenary of whose birth occurs this year, played a truly decisive role. We have wished to commemorate with solemnity this great figure of a Pontiff and man of our century, gratefully recalling his deep faith, his love for the Church and his passion for the proclamation of the Gospel, which led his relationship with the contemporary world to be attentive and difficult, but without compromise.

8. Your Eminences, venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and the priesthood, dear religious and lay collaborators, I have wished to recall some aspects of the Holy See's activity this year, with the intention of expressing in the concrete reality of daily life the message of salvation brought by the Lord's Birth.

I know of the generosity and competence with which you work in the irreplaceable service rendered to the universal Church by the Apostolic See. I am likewise familiar with the deeply motivated faith and sincere love for the Church and for the Pope that inspire you. Your commitment, often silent and hidden, is supremely valuable because it fosters the communion of all believers in Christ and permits the Successor of Peter to fulfil his task of "strengthening his brethren in the faith" (cf. Lk 22:31).

I hope that each one of you may find in these spiritual motives the strength to carry out in a joyful and evangelical way the important tasks Providence entrusts to you. I would like to express my gratitude to everyone for this intelligent, loving and discreet collaboration, which constantly accompanies and sustains the exercise of my ministry.

With our hearts turned to the stable in Bethlehem, let us joyfully accept the message of salvation and peace that the angels bring us, as they proclaim to us that it springs from God's fatherly tenderness for each of us. On the Holy Night, may the Blessed Virgin show us "the blessed fruit of

her womb" and teach us to accept in Gospel poverty, in obedience to the Father's plan and in purity of heart the principal ways to "discern his glory", adoring him as the Lord of our life and confessing with the whole Church: "Incarnatus est de Spiritu Sancto ex Maria Virgine et homo factus est".

With these wishes, as I implore all good things for each of you, I cordially impart my Blessing to everyone.

Happy Christmas!

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