



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE CLERGY OF ROME**

Thursday, 26 February 1998

1. Dear Roman priests, parish priests, curates, deacons and permanent deacons involved in all forms of ministry, I greet you with great affection and am pleased to see that you are taking part in our traditional family meeting. In his greeting the Cardinal Vicar presented the key points of the current missionary activity of the Church in Rome and your testimonies have enriched the picture with examples of what you are accomplishing in the various areas of your pastoral ministry. In fact, the *City Mission* is just now reaching its culmination. Many parishes have already begun the *mission to families* which I myself opened on Sunday, 1 February, when I met a family in Sacred Heart of Jesus Parish in Prati. The others are about to start, now that Lent has begun, which is dedicated in a special way this year to the mission.

2. This second year of immediate preparation for the Great Jubilee is dedicated to the Spirit and his sanctifying presence. I joyfully remember 30 November, the First Sunday of Advent, when I celebrated the beginning of the year of the Spirit with you and with all the missionaries of the Diocese of Rome, by entrusting the Mission Cross to the parishes and individual missionaries. In *Tertio millennio adveniente* I had written that *"in our own day too, the Spirit is the principal agent of the new evangelization"* (n. 45). But the city mission is, for this Rome of ours, the concrete way to carry out the great task of the new evangelization. It fully merits what I added in the same paragraph of the Apostolic Letter: *"Hence it will be important to gain a renewed appreciation of the Spirit as the One who builds the kingdom of God within the course of history and prepares its full manifestation in Jesus Christ, stirring people's hearts and quickening in our world the seeds of the full salvation which will come at the end of time"*.

3. Dear priests, today I would like to reflect with you on the intimate bond that unites our priesthood to the Holy Spirit and the mission. Let us return to the moment of our priestly ordination, when the ordaining Bishop invoked upon us the outpouring of the Spirit of holiness. What the risen Jesus worked in his disciples on the very evening of Easter was renewed in us: *"Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you'. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained'"* (Jn 20:21-23). It is through the gift of the Holy Spirit that the

disciples found the courage to go into the whole world in the name of the Lord, to proclaim him, his salvation and his kingdom; they worked great wonders in his name; they founded the first Christian communities wherever they went. This gift of the Spirit is no less alive and active in us; it has lost nothing of its renewing and sanctifying power. The Spirit is at work in all believers who become missionaries, in obedience to the Lord's call, and it is a cause for joy to see how so many lay people and women religious have answered this call, committing themselves with great generosity to the City Mission. But the Pope repeats to you today what he said to you two years ago on this same occasion: you, who are the first co-workers of the Episcopal Order, are also those to whom the ministry of proclaiming the Gospel to everyone is first entrusted. The City Mission needs priests who are authentic evangelizers and credible witnesses to the faith: this is what the Bishop of Rome expects of you, dear brothers. The special outpouring of the Holy Spirit that is given to us at the moment of ordination, after those already received in Baptism and Confirmation, is the source and root of the special task that is entrusted to us in the mission and in evangelization.

4. We are therefore called to be the first to enter into that dynamic, that spiritual movement which belongs to the mission. As I said to you two years ago, we must enter into it with our being and our soul as priests, with our prayer and therefore with all our daily pastoral efforts. Only the Spirit can accomplish this in us. The mission in fact is a work of love and its effectiveness ultimately depends on the intensity of that love: we are missionaries to the extent that we succeed in testifying that God loves and saves every person, this city and all mankind. But the Holy Spirit is, in the Most Holy Trinity, subsistent love. And, as the Apostle Paul reminds us, *"God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us"* (Rom 5:5). Concretely, the Holy Spirit enables us to look both at our neighbour and at our own life with God's eyes, to love our brothers and sisters with that same heart with which the Lord Jesus loved them, therefore, to understand them, to forgive them, to help and comfort them, to be truly close to them in every circumstance, from the happiest to the saddest, and to be so not in just any way, but as witnesses to Christ and fathers in the faith. Going in this way, together with the lay missionaries, from house to house, from family to family, we will also bring a note of trust and hope; we will give new strength to tired or disheartened souls; we will be able to strengthen family ties that are weakened or on the point of breaking; we will be able to offer a tangible sign that God does not forget anyone.

5. But, dear priests, the Holy Spirit not only accompanies us, he guides us and sustains us during the mission. First of all, he goes before us. In fact, the Spirit is mysteriously present and active in the heart, the conscience and the life of every man and woman. The Spirit knows no boundaries. The Spirit, by working mysteriously and silently in the inmost being of every person, prepares each one, from within, to welcome Christ and his Gospel. Thus dear brothers, when we knock on the door of a house, or on the door of a heart, the Spirit has already gone before us and the message of Christ may sound new to the ears of whoever hears us, but can never sound completely strange to his heart. To feel pessimistic about the possibility or the effectiveness of the mission would therefore, dear brothers, be in a certain sense a sin against the Holy Spirit, showing a lack of trust in his presence and in his work.

6. As the Great Jubilee approaches, the occasions of grace that the Spirit is preparing for the Church and mankind, in particular for this Church and this city of Rome, are taking more precise form. I am thinking of the International Eucharistic Congress; I am thinking of the World Youth Day, the Jubilee of Families, the Jubilee of Priests and the other events planned and expected. The City Mission prepares us priests and our faithful to experience these events in their true meaning of grace, faith and conversion. Thus we must pray unceasingly to the Holy Spirit, because we are well

aware that he alone can convert hearts and bestow faith and grace. In looking at this year's tasks in the light of the Great Jubilee, the visit to families that you will make this Lent appears to be the best preparation for the great event of the Jubilee of Families, the purpose of which is to put Christ at the centre of family life and thus to restore the family to its authentic and inalienable human and Christian dignity. In the same way, the "Youth Mission", which is a specific objective of the City Mission, prepares the ground for the World Youth Day of the Year 2000. On Palm Sunday of this year, the young people of Italy and Rome will receive from the young people of France, in St Peter's Square, the Holy Year Cross that has made a missionary pilgrimage across the continents and nations, from Rome to Buenos Aires, from Santiago de Compostela to Czêstochowa, from Denver to Manila, to Paris and again to Rome. The special meeting of the young people of Rome with the Pope, on the Thursday before Palm Sunday, will also take place outdoors this year for the first time, in the square in front of the Basilica of St John, the cathedral of Rome: in fact we want to be able to welcome all the young people who participate in greater numbers every year, and to emphasize the missionary dimension of this event, directed to every young person in Rome.

7. Dear priests, in addition to its Christological aspect, the Great Jubilee *"has a pneumatological aspect, since the mystery of the Incarnation was accomplished 'by the power of the Holy Spirit'"* (*Dominum et Vivificantem*, n. 50). It was brought about, as we well know, in the womb of the Virgin Mary and through her free, immediate and total consent. Mary is thus *"the woman who was docile to the voice of the Spirit, a woman of silence and attentiveness, a woman of hope who, like Abraham, accepted God's will 'hoping against hope' (cf. Rom 4:18)"* (*Tertio millennio adveniente*, n. 48). Invoking the Holy Spirit cannot, therefore, be separated from trust in Mary, in her whom my venerable Predecessor Paul VI called the "Star of Evangelization". Thus it is to her that we entrust our priesthood and the City Mission. With these sentiments, I cordially impart my Blessing to you all. I would like to add that our meeting today is well-timed. What did we experience in Rome last Sunday, the feast of the Chair of St Peter? New Cardinals were created. But who are the Cardinals? The great majority of them are Roman "parish priests". Many, seven, are Suburbicarian Bishops. Six are Deacons, of the various deaconries, whose number changes. The diaconal office in the College of Cardinals belongs especially to the Roman dicasteries. The Prefects are Deacons, but not all of them. Some are Bishops like Cardinals Ratzinger and Sodano, but most of them are Deacons. The rest, the great majority, are Roman "parish priests". What does this mean? It means that every Roman parish is associated with a Cardinal. I think there are more and more Roman parishes with a cardinalitial title, because the number of Cardinals has grown.

The Holy Father then invited those present to pray for Cardinal Poletti.

Let us now remember Cardinal Ugo Poletti, who was here with us so many times at this gathering on the Thursday after Ash Wednesday.

At the end of the meeting the Holy Father wished those present a "Happy Lent and Happy Easter".

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