



The Holy See

**LETTER OF POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO PRIESTS TAKING PART IN
THE THIRD INTERNATIONAL MEETING OF PRIESTS
IN MEXICO**

Dear Brothers in the Priesthood,

1. I am pleased to send you a cordial greeting on the occasion of your participation in the Third International Meeting of Priests. It is taking place at the feet of the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe in the basilica of her name in Tepeyac, Mexico. This is the third phase of a spiritual pilgrimage towards the Holy Door of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 after the previous phases in the Marian shrines of Fátima, Portugal, and Yamoussoukro, Côte d'Ivoire.

You have a very special place in the heart of Peter's Successor. Thinking of you, I am reminded of the churches and chapels in which you celebrate Mass, the houses where you live, the places you visit, the characteristic activities of your ministry with children, young people, adults, families and other groups to whom you dispense God's treasures. On this occasion, I would like once again to express my affection and esteem to all of you who have set out on this pilgrimage from the places where you normally exercise your priestly ministry to renew the bonds of communion of life, the missionary dimension of your work and the catholicity of your horizons. To achieve a new, increasingly effective and united evangelization, I would also like you to encourage one another, expressing most eloquently the new brotherhood created among you through the sacrament of Orders. In this regard, I am pleased to know that thanks to a basic solidarity fund you have set up, you have enabled priests from countries with economic difficulties to be present here.

I am grateful to the Congregation for the Clergy, to the Prefect, Cardinal Darío Castrillón Hoyos, to the Secretary, Mons. Csaba Ternyák and to the organizers who have worked to ensure the success of this meeting. I also thank the Cardinals and Bishops whose participation clearly demonstrates their esteem and love for priests.

2. Dear brothers, you have been marked with an indelible character that confers a specific priestly identity on your entire life and in a particular way configures you to Christ the Head, to the men and women of our time you are called to be living images of the Lord, the Supreme Pastor of all the faithful. Everyone you encounter on your priestly journey through life must see you as such, as we read in the Guadalupan text *Nican Nopoua*, where it cites the Most Holy Virgin's words

to Juan Diego: "Listen, Juanito my son, where are you going?" And he said: "My Lady and Queen, my Joy, I am going to your little house at Tlatelolco in Mexico to look after God's affairs which are given and taught to us by those who are images of Our Lord: our priests" (nn. 22-23).

We well know that all the baptized share in Christ's priesthood; but although the common and the ministerial priesthoods are ordered one to another, they differ essentially and not only in degree (cf. *Lumen gentium*, n. 10). So that the faithful may be united in one body in which each member methodically carries out different and complimentary tasks, the Lord himself appoints some as ministers, endowing them with a sacred power that derives from ordination (cf. *Presbyterorum ordinis*, n. 2).

By virtue of Christ's seal which has been impressed upon you, you are transformed into God's exclusive property to occupy yourselves, body and soul, with extending the mission to proclaim the presence of God's kingdom among men. This is a reality you must always bear in mind, recalling that Christ called the first Apostles "to be with him, and to be sent out to preach" (Mk 3:14). He sends them out in his name with the power of the saving Word and the force of the Spirit, so that he can clearly explain to them: "He who receives you receives me" (Mt 10:40).

3. Your sacramental character enables you to continue Christ's mission by proclaiming the Good News. Through you, he continues to guide and shepherd his flock and, by means of the sacred acts you accomplish, offers his redemptive sacrifice, forgives sins and dispenses his grace. It is you who put the divine Teacher's mission into practice and you were chosen from eternity to act on behalf of men in matters relating to God, as a living continuation of Christ's ministry (cf. Heb 5:1). As St John Chrysostom wrote on the priesthood: "If God did not work through him, you would not have been baptized, you would not share in the mysteries, nor would you be a Christian" (*Homily on 2 Tm 2:2-4*).

Be mindful of him who sent you and take care of the mission you have received. May Jesus' words resound within you: "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you" (Jn 20:21). Since it is you who are in charge, you are at the forefront of the new evangelization, having been endowed with the strength, authority and dignity that will enable you to carry out the work of Jesus Christ.

With regard to the difficulties you will have to face, never doubt that the Spirit, the Paraclete, will be your counsel and advocate and will give you the strength to overcome all obstacles. Continue therefore confident and secure in his power and may you experience relief and rest in frequent and prolonged prayer. Prayer unifies the priest's life which so often risks being fragmented by the multiplicity of the tasks he must undertake; prayer makes what you do authentic, because it draws from the Heart of Christ the sentiments that motivate your work. Do not be afraid to dedicate time and energy to it, indeed strive to be men of diligent prayer, enjoying the silence of contemplation and the devout daily celebration of the Eucharist and the Liturgy of the Hours which the Church has entrusted to you for the good of Christ's entire Body. The priest's prayer is also a requirement of his pastoral ministry, since Christian communities are enriched by the witness of the prayerful priest who proclaims the mystery of God with his words and with his life.

4. Your mission dear brothers, is one of great dignity and this must inspire you to devote yourselves to caring for the faithful with concern and generosity like the Good Shepherd. The number of priests who dedicate their lives with selfdenial to the service of God and their brethren is a consolation. The holy People of God loves you, appreciates your

sacrifices, is grateful for your dedication and pastoral service. May the misunderstandings, fears and sometimes even persecutions of different kinds which mark the lives of some, not diminish the fervour of your self-giving nor the zeal you show in your holy ministry (cf. Rom 8:37). Do not be afraid, since you represent Jesus, conqueror of the world and of evil. Do not lose the enthusiasm of the first years of your priestly ministry nor feel downcast, but sustain each other in the fraternal priesthood that draws its strength from the same sacrament.

5. This meeting will focus on three themes: “*To be converted in order to convert*”, “*In communion to promote communion*” and “*With the Virgin Mary for mission*”. Through reflection and study on these lines, it will be possible to achieve good results and especially to intensify the preparation for our entry now close at hand through the Holy Door of the Great Jubilee, to “celebrate the Incarnation and coming into the world of the Son of God, the mystery of salvation for all mankind” (*Tertio millennio adveniente*, n. 40) when the time has fully come (cf. Gal 4:4).

I ardently hope that at the end of this meeting you will return to your mission posts enriched with a magnificent experience of priestly fraternity and keen to transmit to your diocesan parishes and the communities you serve a renewed apostolic dynamism which will encourage evangelization, taking as a reference point the distinctive pillars of religious life in the Latin American lands which welcomed you during these days: the Eucharist, “source and the summit of all preaching of the Gospel” (*Presbyterorum ordinis*, n. 5); ecclesial communion, fruit of the presence of Jesus Christ (cf. *Lumen gentium*, n. 4) and the Virgin Most Holy, Mother of the Church.

I entrust the work of this meeting to her whose image was miraculously imprinted on the mantle of Juan Diego, who is venerated by the peoples on this continent by the title of Our Lady of Guadalupe and “is the first evangelizer of America” (cf. Letter *Los caminos del Evangelio*, n. 34), and as I ask her to continue to guide your steps and make your evangelizing tasks fruitful, I cordially impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you.

From the Vatican, 29 June 1998, the Solemnity of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul.

IOANNES PAULUS PP.II

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