



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER TO CARDINALS, PAPAL HOUSEHOLD AND ROMAN CURIA

Tuesday, 21 December 1999

*Rorate caeli desuper, et nubes pluant iustum!
Aperiatur terra, et germinet Salvatorem! (Is 45: 8).*

1. I meet you with deep joy, dear members of the College of Cardinals and personnel of the Roman Curia, at our traditional appointment, which nonetheless today seems particularly significant: it is the last one of the century and of the millennium. This particular circumstance invites us to turn our thoughts to the horizon where time flows, to adore God's plans and to renew our faith in Christ, the Lord of history.

I thank you, the Cardinal Dean, for the expressions of devotion you addressed to me on behalf of the College of Cardinals and those present. Thank you for your good wishes, which I wholeheartedly reciprocate to you, to the Cardinals and to all the members of the Roman Curia.

Let us hold this meeting in the knowledge that we form a very special community, the community of the closest co-workers of the Bishop of Rome, Successor of the Apostle Peter. The dimension that unites us can be summed up in the expression *ministerium petrinum*.

2. *Ministerium*, that is, service. The Son of God, who was born as a man in Bethlehem, would say of himself: "The Son of man ... came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (*Mk 10: 45*). Christ thus leaves us the model, indeed, the "standard" against which the vocation of each one of us should be measured.

If the vocation of the Successor of Peter, supported by his co-workers, has a special meaning in

the Church, it is precisely because it is a ministry, a service. Christ said to Peter: "Strengthen your brethren" - *confirma fratres tuos* (Lk 22: 32). We know well the dramatic context of the divine Teacher's words: now close to his Passion, to Peter's declaration: "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death" (Lk 22: 33), he replied: "I tell you ..., the cock will not crow this day, until you three times deny that you know me" (Lk 22: 34). It is in this context that Christ's words are spoken: "I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren" (Lk 22: 32).

3. To understand the full meaning of Peter's vocation in the Church we must review the whole context. In the Evangelist's account, Peter appears in all his weakness. Thus his capacity to "strengthen" is not his own: it comes from the power of Christ who prays for him. It is with Christ's power that he can sustain his brethren, despite his own personal weakness. It is necessary to keep this truth about the *ministerium petrinum* in mind. The man who, as Peter's Successor, exercises this *ministerium* can never forget it, and neither can it be forgotten by those who in any capacity exercise it.

At today's meeting I would like to embrace in memory the Supreme Pontiffs who have succeeded one another in the span of this millennium and all those who, in the most varied ways, worked with them. "Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your master" (Mt 25: 23). We trust that all who have participated in the *ministerium petrinum* have heard these words of Christ. We trust that we too will hear them when we are called to present ourselves before the supreme tribunal.

May today's meditation cross the threshold of the third millennium and be received by those who will succeed us, who after us will take on the *ministerium petrinum* as the Successors of Peter and as their co-workers, to exercise it according to Christ's will. I express this wish to all my beloved brothers and sisters in the great community we form, constantly thanking one and all for the support, help and generous collaboration they offer me.

4. *Confirma fratres tuos!* Together with all the People of God throughout the world, in these years we have walked towards the Great Jubilee. Looking back at our journey so far, I feel it my duty to thank the Lord first of all for the Trinitarian inspiration which has marked it. From year to year we have paused in contemplation before the persons of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. During the Holy Year we will sing the glory common to the three divine Persons. Thus more than ever we feel we are a people gathered in the Trinity, "*de unitate Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti plebs adunata*" (St Cyprian, *De Orat. Dom. 23: PL 4, 536; cf. Lumen gentium*, n. 4).

Many projects have been started in the particular Churches in preparation for the Jubilee Year. On a universal level, the continental Synods have been of great importance, and it is right to expect them to yield abundant fruit on the basis of the practical directives in their respective Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortations. Early this year, I was able to present the Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in*

America in Mexico City, hoping for a renewed evangelizing impulse among the numerous American Christians. In June, I traveled to my homeland, visiting several Dioceses in Poland, where I had not yet been. Last month I delivered the Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* to India, encouraging the small Catholic community in Asia to proclaim Christ the Saviour confidently, also in dialogue with the ancient religions of that immense continent. Then in October the Second Special Assembly of the Synod for Europe was held, during which the complex challenge of evangelization on the European continent was addressed: a challenge which we have entrusted to the intercession of the saints and more especially to the three patrons, Benedict, Cyril and Methodius, whom I wished to join in the devotion of the People of God with three women saints: St Bridget of Sweden, St Catherine of Siena and St Teresa Benedicta of the Cross - Edith Stein.

5. *Confirma fratres tuos!* The year now ending was also important from the ecumenical standpoint. In *Tertio millennio adveniente* I hoped that the Great Jubilee would succeed in seeing Christians "if not completely united, at least much closer to overcoming the divisions of the second millennium" (n. 34). Unfortunately, this goal is still distant. But how could the deep emotion of my recent visits to Romania and Georgia be forgotten? I went as a brother among brothers, and in the reception given me by those ancient communities I was able to taste something of the joy which accompanied for centuries the relations between East and West. The Church then breathed fully with the "two lungs" of her different and complementary traditions, which express the treasure of the one Christian mystery. Then what can be said of the progress made in relations with our brethren of the Lutheran tradition? The document on justification, recently signed in Augsburg, is a great step forward and an encouragement to pursue our dialogue with determination, so that Christ's invocation "Father ... that they may be one" (*Jn* 17: 11, 21) may be fulfilled. Another significant step towards a clarification of relations with the Hussite tradition was last week's congress on Jan Hus which took place right here at the Vatican with broad participation by eminent scholars from all backgrounds.

6. *Rorate caeli desuper et nubes pluant iustum!* This year too the Church's gaze has extended beyond her visible borders, to discern the mysterious action of God's Spirit among all people and particularly among believers of other religions. On the initiative of the *Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue*, in the wake of the unforgettable Assisi meeting in 1986, last October we gathered in St Peter's Square with representatives of the world's various religions. We promoted that meeting in full harmony with the spirit of the Council, which in the declaration *Nostra aetate* encouraged dialogue with the other religions, suggesting however that it should take place without succumbing to indifferentism or the temptation of syncretism. Faith in Christ, "the Way, and the Truth, and the Life" (*Jn* 14: 6; cf. *Nostra aetate*, n. 2), is the Church's *raison d'être* and the strength that supports her and directs her action in the world. It is on this basis that the encounter with believers of other religions demonstrates its full fruitfulness. It is both legitimate and significant because there are many fields of action on which we agree in our service to God and mankind, and because it is the Church's duty to glorify God for the rays of truth which he extends to his children in all the corners of the earth, offering in a way known to him alone that salvation which

has its source in Christ's paschal mystery (cf. *Gaudium et spes*, n. 22).

7. The proclamation of salvation must be accompanied by an active witness of charity. This year too, confronted by the great problems of the world, the Apostolic See has made every effort so that the Gospel leaven might not be lacking. Thus it has sustained on their journey the People of God who, in their local pastoral realities, take responsibility for human needs and put themselves at the service of the neediest in thousands of ways. There has been a concern to promote a "culture of charity", which can develop fraternal relationships among people, doing away with prejudices and disposing people to be humble in encounter and dialogue. The dicasteries of the Roman Curia, especially those most involved in the area of culture and social problems, continue this worthy and responsible work. Along these same lines, several days ago I offered a few ideas for reflection in my annual Message for the World Day of Peace. May the newborn Child of Bethlehem, the Prince of Peace, bless the efforts that all people of good will make to this end.

8. *Venite et ascendamus ad montem Domini (Is 2: 3)*. May this Christmas, which opens the celebrations of the Jubilee Year, be for each of us an ascent of the Lord's mountain, where his glory is revealed to those who have put off their old nature (cf. *Eph 4: 22-24*) and put on the wedding garment (cf. *Mt 22: 12*), opening themselves fully to Christ.

Ascendamus ad montem Domini! Yes, let us hasten our steps with faith towards the Jubilee, an extraordinary year of grace, expressed in particular by the gift of the indulgence. Far from being a "discount" on the need for Christians to change their life, this requires them to change it even more.

The spiritual commitment we have made so far and which we must also continue, even in the areas of the respective dicasteries' competence and, especially, in that of the Committee for the Holy Year, intends to help all believers become aware of the true meaning of the Jubilee event. "Repent, and believe in the Gospel" (*Mk 1: 15*). This is the message that must ring out more and more intensely in the coming months.

May the Jubilee events, scheduled in different ways and places, and, those that will be celebrated here in Rome in particular, be powerful expressions of the way of conversion, which involves the entire People of God.

9. *Ecce, virgo concipiet et pariet filium et vocabit nomen eius Emmanuel (Is 7: 14)*.

May Christmas and the Jubilee Year powerfully restore to us this certainty which for 2,000 years has sustained the Church's journey, spur her to the effort of proclamation and encourage her to constant conversion. The Child born in Bethlehem is Emmanuel, *God-with-us*. He is the risen Christ who guides history and who will come in glory at the end of time.

I warmly hope that each one of you, Your Eminences, and all of you, esteemed members of the Roman Curia, will deeply experience the fruits of his presence in the joy of having been chosen to collaborate closely in the ministry of the Successor of Peter, as heralds of his kingdom of love and peace.

I affectionately bless you all. Happy Christmas! May you have a fruitful Holy Year!