



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS ON THE OCCASION  
OF THE INAUGURATION OF THE FACADE OF  
SAINT PETER'S BASILICA**

*September 30, 1999*

*Your Eminences and Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,  
Mr President and Mr Prime Minister of the Italian Republic,  
Ambassadors to the Holy See and to Italy,  
Executives and Technicians of ENI,  
Ladies and Gentlemen!*

1. Today our attention is focused on the façade of the Vatican Basilica, for centuries the witness of great events that have left their mark on history. We are gathered here to celebrate the successful completion of the restoration work, which for over two years has involved engineers, architects, marble workers, stonecutters, plasterers, blacksmiths and other craftsmen. Thanks to their work, accomplished with great skill and competence, the Vatican Basilica, already beautiful in its interior, now appears with all the majestic solemnity of the façade with which Maderno adorned it.

In extending my cordial greetings to everyone gathered here, with a particular thought for the Cardinal Archpriest who has nobly expressed the sentiments shared by all, I wish to express my deep gratitude to all who have devoted their energies to restoring this architectural masterpiece to its original splendour. My thanks go in a special way to ENI, the National Hydrocarbon Corporation, whose lavish generosity made this restoration possible, using the latest technology for that purpose.

2. As we pause to admire the impressive results of this work, our hearts are spontaneously filled with the desire to bless the Lord, who has given man the ability to control matter and to ennoble it by imprinting the seal of his spirit upon it.

How much effort was spent on the work we are admiring! The marbles, hewn with countless blows of hammer and chisel, then polished with the utmost care and patience, have been beautifully joined to adorn the top of the façade. In a transfigured vision of God's temple, we can interpret the different elements as the symbol and image of the variety of gifts and charisms with which the divine Craftsman has wished to adorn the Church, his mystical Bride.

3. The admiring gaze that we turn this evening to the architectural structure of the façade anticipates that of the countless pilgrims who will come here from every part of the world during the now imminent Holy Year. They will be able to relive the experiences of pilgrims past who were enthralled by the magnificent and solid structures of this imposing basilica, which the faith of our ancestors raised "*in honorem Principis Apostolorum*", as we read in the dedicatory inscription placed there by Pope Paul V in 1612.

This church, crowned with Michelangelo's dome, was built for Peter and for his glorious tomb; Pope Clement VIII, expressing the idea of his predecessor Sixtus V, dedicated it "*sancti Petri gloriae*", to the glory of St Peter. This is confirmed by the many depictions of the Apostle which appear in every part of the building. On this façade too, a high relief by the Milanese Ambrogio Bonvicino portrays St Peter receiving the keys from Christ.

4. In a certain way, then, the Apostle Peter continues his mission as the "vicar of Christ's love", humbly but firmly professing his faith. And "every tongue that praises the Lord", as Leo the Great said, "is trained by the teaching authority of this voice" (*Sermones* 3, 3).

It is easy to understand, then, how our enjoyment of this restored masterpiece cannot be merely aesthetic, but must be open to the interior attraction of the spiritual reality it signifies. Peter reminds us of this and he does all who are gathered in spirit around his tomb this evening, as one day in the years 63-64 he wrote from Rome to the Christians of Asia Minor, whom he had evangelized: "Like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God" (1 *Pt* 2: 5).

Dear brothers and sisters, let us accept this invitation to be living stones, active members of the spiritual house which is the Church. May the imminent Jubilee find us ready to proclaim and bear witness to our faith with generous dedication. The restoration work reminds us that every believer, every one of us, is called to continual conversion and to a courageous review of life, so that we can meet Christ in a profound way and benefit fully from the fruits of the Holy Year.

May it be so for everyone. With this wish, as I invoke the intercession of Blessed Mary and of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul on those present and on those who in various ways contributed to this extraordinary work of restoration, I gladly impart to all my Apostolic Blessing.

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