



The Holy See

JUBILEE OF BISHOPS

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II

Saturday 7 October 2000

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate!

1. *Quam bonum et quam iucundum habitare fratres in unum!* (Ps 133: 1). Today the psalmist's joy, an echo of the rejoicing of the children of Israel, is our joy. The sight of so many Bishops gathered together from every part of the world *has not been seen since the times of the Second Vatican Council*. Our gathering today takes my mind back to those years of grace when the presence of God's Spirit was powerfully felt like the thrill of a new Pentecost. It is beautiful that the Great Jubilee has provided a fitting occasion for so many of us to come together. The fraternal communion that binds us through episcopal collegiality is also fostered by these signs.

I thank you for the sentiments of communion that you have expressed to me through dear Archbishop Giovanni Battista Re, who at this time, after years of service as my close collaborator in the Secretariat of State, has taken up the sensitive and important office of Prefect of the Congregation for Bishops. I also express my gratitude to Cardinal Bernardin Gantin and Cardinal Lucas Moreira Neves for the valuable work they accomplished with diligence and wisdom at the head of this dicastery.

2. At first sight today's meeting could seem superfluous, since each of you has fully opened himself to the grace of the Jubilee and accompanied your own faithful to various Jubilee sites in your Diocese and nation. But we felt the need for a celebration that would be *totally our own*, so to speak, in order to increase our commitment, and even more so, our joyful gratitude for the gift of the fullness of the priesthood. It was as though we had heard once again the invitation that one day the Teacher addressed to the Twelve, who were showing the weariness of their apostolic work: "Come away by yourselves to a lonely place, and rest a while" (Mk 6: 31). Coming to Rome

today is certainly not withdrawing to a lonely place! In compensation, *at the See of Peter's Successor each of you can feel at ease*, as though in your own home, and together we can all have an hour of spiritual "rest", gathered around Christ.

For the moment you have left behind your pastoral cares to spend some time in spiritual renewal at a special meeting with those who, like you, carry the *sarcina episcopalis*. By this action you have also stressed your sense of being *members of the one People of God*, on your way with the other faithful to the definitive encounter with Christ. Yes, Bishops too, like all Christians, are on their way towards the homeland and are in need of God's help and mercy. You are here in this spirit to implore with me the special grace of the Jubilee.

Thus we can experience together all the consolation of the truth stated by St Augustine: "For you I am Bishop, with you I am Christian. The first is the title of the office I received, the second is by grace; the first implies danger, the second salvation" (*Sermo* 340, 1: *PL* 38, 1483).

3. *Dilexit Ecclesiam!* (Eph 5: 25). At this moment Paul's words to the Ephesians spring from our hearts as Pastors; they remind us that our Jubilee is first of all *an invitation to measure ourselves by the love that beats in the heart of Christ*. We look to him, the eternal Son of God who, in the fullness of time, became man in Mary's womb. We look to him, our Saviour and Saviour of the whole human race. We look to him who, by the Incarnation, became in a certain sense the "kinsman" of every human being. The range of his love is as vast as the world. No one is excluded from his loving gaze.

Open to the world, Christ's love is at the same time *a love of predilection*. Universal love and love of predilection do not contradict each other but are like two concentric circles. It is through his love of predilection that Christ gives birth to the Church as his Body and his Bride, making her the sacrament of salvation for all. *Dilexit eam!* Today, with all the People of God, we feel touched anew by this loving gaze.

In that *dilexit Ecclesiam* each of us finds *the model and strength of his ministry*, the foundation and living root of the mystery that dwells in him. As men conformed sacramentally to Christ, the Shepherd and Bridegroom of the Church, we are called, dear Brothers in the Episcopate, to "re-live" in our thoughts, in our sentiments, in our choices, the love and total self-giving of Jesus Christ for his Church. In short, love for Christ and love for the Church *are one indivisible love*. In this *diligere Ecclesiam*, which imitates and shares in the *dilexit Ecclesiam* of Christ, we find the grace and commitment of our Jubilee celebration.

4. The supreme purpose of the *dilexit Ecclesiam* is clearly indicated by the Apostle: "Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her" (Eph 5: 25-26). So it is with our episcopal service: it is meant to serve the holiness of the Church.

All our pastoral activity has *as its ultimate goal* the sanctification of the faithful, beginning with priests, our closest collaborators. It must therefore aim at inspiring in them *the commitment to respond promptly and generously to the Lord's call*. Is not our own witness of personal holiness the most credible and convincing appeal that the laity and clergy have a right to expect on their way to holiness? It is precisely "to inspire in all the faithful a true longing for holiness" that the Jubilee was proclaimed (*Tertio millennio adveniente*, n. 42).

We must reflect anew on what the Second Vatican Council says about the *universal call to holiness*. It is not by chance that the Council addressed the Bishops first of all, reminding them that they must "carry out their ministry with holiness and eagerness, with humility and fortitude; thus fulfilled, this ministry will also be for them an outstanding means of sanctification" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 41). It is the image - as we see - of a holiness that does not grow *alongside* their ministry, but *through* their ministry itself. A holiness that develops as *pastoral charity*, finding its model in Christ the Good Shepherd and spurring every Pastor to make himself an "example for the flock" (cf. 1 Pt 5: 3).

5. This pastoral charity must give life to the *tria munera* in which our ministry is carried out. First of all the *munus docendi*, that is, the service of teaching. When we reread the Acts of the Apostles, we are impressed by the fervour with which the first band of Apostles abundantly scattered the seed of the Word by the power of the Spirit. We must *recapture the enthusiasm for preaching felt at Pentecost*. In a world which is experiencing a sort of inflation of words as a result of the mass media, the words of the Apostle can only be distinguished and make headway if they are presented with all the brightness of the Gospel as a *word filled with life*. Let us not be afraid of preaching the Gospel "*opportune et importune*" (2 Tm 4: 2). Today especially, among the many dissonant voices that spread confusion and doubt in the minds of the faithful, the Bishop has *the serious responsibility* to make things clear. *The preaching of the Gospel is the greatest act of love* for man, his freedom and his thirst for happiness.

Through the liturgy, the source and summit of ecclesial life (cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 10), this same charity becomes a sign, a celebration and a prayer. Here the *dilexit Ecclesiam* of Christ becomes a *living remembrance and effective presence*. In this work more than in any other, the Bishop's role appears as the *munus sanctificandi*, the ministry of sanctifying, through the active presence of the Holy One *par excellence*.

Lastly, the Bishop's charity must shine in the vast field of pastoral leadership: in the *munus regendi*. Many things are asked of us. In all of them we must act "as a good shepherd who knows his sheep and whose sheep know him, as a true father who excels in his love and solicitude for all" (*Christus Dominus*, n. 16). It is a service of love that must neglect no one, but must pay *special attention to the "lowliest"*, with that "preferential option for the poor" that, following Jesus' example, is the expression of both justice and charity.

6. The Jubilee, dear Brothers, is the time of the "great indulgence". The serious responsibilities that are entrusted to us and the many difficulties that our episcopal ministry encounters today make *the awareness of our spiritual inadequacy more painfully acute*, and so our prayer for the Father's indulgent love must be stronger and more insistent. However, the mercy that we receive from Christ's sacrifice, made present each day in the Eucharist, fills us with the firmest hope. We must proclaim and give evidence of this hope to a world that has lost or distorted it. It is a hope founded on the certainty that *Christ is always present and active in his Church* and in human history.

It can seem at times, as in the Gospel episode of the calming of the storm (*Mk 4: 35-41; Lk 8: 22-25*), that Christ is asleep and has left us at the mercy of the turbulent waves. But we know that he is always ready to intervene with his almighty and saving love. He continues to say to us: "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (*Jn 16: 33*).

We are sustained in our efforts by the closeness of Mary, the Mother whom Christ gave to us from the Cross, saying to the beloved Apostle: "Behold, your Mother" (*Jn 19: 26*). To her, *Regina Apostolorum*, we entrust our Churches and our lives, opening ourselves with trust to the adventure and challenges of the new millennium.

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