



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS AND FRIENDS
OF THE FOCOLARE MOVEMENT**

Thursday 28 February 2002

Venerable Brothers,

1. I welcome you with great joy during your meeting on the subject of the better understanding of the spirituality of communion, sponsored by the "Focolare" Movement. I cordially greet each one, with special thanks to Cardinal Miloslav Vlk for expressing your feelings of respect and for illustrating the topics of your meeting. I also want to greet the Foundress of the Movement, Chiara Lubich, who is here with us.

*Dear friends, you are reflecting on communion, the constitutive reality of the Church. The Church, as the Second Vatican Council clearly emphasizes, finds herself between God and the world, gathered together in the name of the Blessed Trinity to be "the sign and instrument of communion with God and of unity among all men" (Lumen gentium, n. 1). Therefore communion within the Christian people is something that always has to be assimilated, lived and expressed better, even with an unfolding in programmes, at the level of the universal and of the particular Churches. It is important to promote an authentic and profound *spirituality of communion*, as I said in my Apostolic Letter Novo Millennio ineunte (cf. n. 43). This need concerns all the members of the ecclesial community, but it is especially the task of *Pastors* to ensure that the different gifts and ministries contribute to the common edification of believers and to the spread of the Gospel.*

2. The service of unity, on which you rightly like to place great emphasis, is intrinsically *marked by the Cross*. The Lord suffered the passion and death to destroy hostility and reconcile human beings with the Father and with one another. Shaped by his example, the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ, prolongs his work. With the power of the Holy Spirit she participates intimately in the Mystery of Easter for without it, there is no growth of the Kingdom of God.

The experience of history stresses that the Church lives the Passion and the Cross indissolubly *united with her risen Lord*, enlightened and comforted by the presence that he himself guaranteed for all time, even to the end of the world (cf. Mt 28,20). It is the Lord himself on whose glorious body the marks of the nails and the spear remain (cf. Jn 20,20.27), who associates his friends in his suffering, to conform them to his glory. In the first place this was the experience of the *Apostles*, to whom believers on their pilgrimage constantly refer. The Apostles' ministry of communion and evangelization enjoyed the same fruitfulness as Christ's: the fruitfulness of the grain of wheat, as the Evangelist John recalls, which bears fruit in abundance *if and because* it dies in the earth (cf. Jn 12,24).

3. A sign *par excellence* of this paschal fruitfulness are the fruits of the Spirit, and first and foremost "*love, joy and peace*" (Gal 5,22), that, in the variety of styles and charisms, also characterize the witness of saints in every age and nation. Even in trial, even in the most tragic situations, nothing and no one can take from those who live united with Christ the certainty of his love (cf. Rom 8,37-39) and the joy of being and feeling oneness with him.

I pray for an abundance of this love, this joy and this peace for each one of you, dear Brothers in the Episcopate, and for the communities entrusted to your care. May Mary, the Virgin of faithful love, watch over you and your ministry. May she help you to walk in perfect harmony with the heart of her divine Son, the source of boundless love and mercy. I assure you that I constantly remember you in my prayer and very gladly impart a special Blessing to you, which I extend to all those you meet daily in your pastoral service.