



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

ANGELUS

Sunday, 2 August 1998

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. Next Thursday will be the Feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord, a particularly significant day, rich in memories. My venerable Predecessor, the Servant of God Paul VI, the centenary of whose birth is being celebrated today, died in Castel Gandolfo precisely on 6 August, 20 years ago. I will have another opportunity to pay a solemn tribute to his memory during my pilgrimage to Brescia on 20 September.

Today I would like to go back in spirit to 6 August 1964, when he had been Pope for little more than a year and published his first Encyclical, *Ecclesiam suam*, during the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council. Although he himself said he merely wanted to offer the Church a “fraternal and informal message” (n. 7), this Encyclical is a programmatic document of his Pontificate and in a certain way sums up his whole personality as priest, teacher and attentive expert in humanity and in history.

2. Re-reading the pages of *Ecclesiam suam*, we realize how it is first and foremost an act of love for the Church and a profound reflection on three interrelated aspects: the Church’s conscience, her authentic renewal and her relationship with the world.

The third part, entitled “The Dialogue”, illustrates — as the Pontiff himself writes — an “attitude which the Catholic Church should adopt at this period in the history of the world” (n. 58). The document is largely concerned with the treatment of dialogue as a style and method of relating to modern society. This is why *Ecclesiam suam* is often described as the “Encyclical of dialogue” which is still totally up to date.

In our time, as we look towards the third millennium, it should be re-read with greater attention and deeper understanding in order to grasp its full prophetic value and to implement the Council’s directives in the best way.

3. When he closed the fifth session of the Council on 21 November that same year, Paul VI said that “knowledge of the true Catholic teaching on Mary will always be a key to the exact understanding of the mystery of Christ and of the Church” (AAS 56 (1964), 1115). Immediately afterwards he proclaimed Mary “Mother of the Church”.

Today, as I recall those moments of deep spiritual fervour which God has granted me to live, I would like to renew the entrustment of the entire ecclesial community of the whole world to Mary, Mother of the Redeemer and Mother of the Church.

After leading the recitation of the Angelus, the Holy Father greeted the pilgrims and visitors in various languages. To the English-speaking visitors he said:

I extend a warm welcome to the English-speaking visitors present at our Marian prayer, especially to the large group from the Allstate Insurance Company from the United States of America. Our prayer today to God, through Mary, is an invocation of peace for people in every part of the world who are deprived of justice and subjected to violence. May God bless you and your families!

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