



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II TO THE CLERGY OF ROME

Hall of Blessings

Thursday, 9 November 1978

Lord Cardinal,

1. I wish to thank you heartily for the words addressed to me at the beginning of this meeting of ours today. Together with the Cardinal Vicar, Mons. the Vicegerent and the Auxiliary Bishops, the Clergy of the diocese of Rome is present here to meet the new Bishop of Rome, whom Christ designated by means of the Cardinals' vote in the Conclave on 16 October, after the sudden death of beloved Pope John Paul I. I must confess to you, dear Confrères, that I greatly desired and looked forward to this meeting. However, taking over the succession to my Venerable Predecessors—barely three months, in fact, have passed since the death also of the great Pope Paul VI—I thought it should be done gradually. All the more so in that the circumstances are so unusual.

The succession of the Bishops of Rome, after 455 years, includes a Pope who comes from beyond the frontiers of Italy. Therefore I considered it necessary that the taking possession of the diocese of Rome, together with the solemn entrance into the basilica of St John Lateran, should be preceded by a period of preparation. In the meantime, I wished to take my place in that magnificent movement of Christian tradition in Italy expressed by the figures of its Patron Saints: St Francis of Assisi and St Catherine of Siena. After this preparation, I wish to carry out the fundamental duty of my pontificate, that is, to take possession of Rome as a diocese, as the Church of this City, and officially assume responsibility for this Community, this tradition, which has its origins in St Peter Apostle. I am deeply aware of having become Pope of the universal Church, because of being Bishop of Rome. The ministry (*munus*) of the Bishop of Rome, as Peter's Successor, is the root of universality.

Our meeting today, on the feast of the Dedication of the Lateran Basilica, is, as it were, an inauguration of the solemn act which will take place on Sunday next. I greet the Cardinal Vicar, Mons. the Vicegerent, the Bishops and all the priests gathered here, both diocesan and religious. I extend the most cordial welcome to all on behalf of Christ the Saviour.

2. I listened with great attention to the Cardinal Vicar's address. I add that, even before our meeting today, he has been so kind as to inform me about various questions concerning the Diocese of Rome, and in particular about the pastoral activity which weighs on your shoulders, dear Brother Priests, in it, the first in dignity among the dioceses of the Church.

As I was listening to the address, I realized with joy that the most essential problems are not new to me. They are part of all my preceding experience. As a result of twenty years of episcopal service and nearly fifteen of pastoral guidance in one of the most ancient dioceses of Poland, the archdiocese of Krakow, these problems relive in my memories, forcing me to compare them with one another, though remaining aware—as is obvious—of the difference in the situations. I am perfectly aware what evangelization and pastoral activity mean in a city whose historic centre is rich in churches that are becoming empty, while at the same time new districts and suburbs are springing up for which it is necessary to provide; often even struggling to obtain new churches, new parishes, and the other fundamental conditions for evangelization. I remember the admirable, zealous and often heroic priests, with whom I was able to share the concern and the struggles. Along this way, faith, nourished by tradition, acquires new strength. Secularization, planned or springing from habits and tendencies among the inhabitants of a large city, stops when it meets a living testimony of faith, which also clearly shows the social dimension of the Gospel.

I know too, Dear Brothers, the significance of the individual institutions and structures which the Cardinal Vicar of Rome has been good enough to mention. That is, the Curia, in our case the Vicariate of Rome, the Prefectures and the respective Council of Parish Priest Prefects, and the Priests' Council. I have learned to give their rightful value to all these forms of group work. They are not only administrative structures, but centres by means of which our priestly communion is expressed and realized, as well as the union of the pastoral service and of evangelization. In my preceding episcopal work the Priests' Council rendered me great service, both as a community, and as a meeting place to share, together with the Bishop, common solicitude for the whole life of the "presbyterate" and for the effectiveness of its pastoral activity.

Among the institutions that the Cardinal Vicar enumerated in his address, the following three were always very near and dear to me in my preceding service as bishop: the diocesan seminary, the University of Theological Sciences, and the parish.

How I wish I could contribute to their development! The seminary is, in fact, "the apple" not only of the Bishops' eye, but of that of the whole local and universal Church. The University of Theological Sciences—in this case the Lateran University—will be as dear to me as the Theology Faculty in

Krakow, with the attached institutes, was and remains dear to me. With regard to the parish, how profoundly true I find the affirmation that the bishop feels more at ease "in the parish"! How I loved the visits to the parishes—fundamental organizational cells of the Church and at same time of the community of the People of God! I hope that I will be able to continue them here too in order to get to know your problems and those of the parishes. In this connection, we have already had preliminary talks with His Eminence and his Bishops.

3. Everything I say refers to you and concerns you directly, dear Brother Priests of Rome. As I meet you here for the first time and greet you with sincere affection, I have still before my eyes and in my heart the "presbyterate" of the Church of Krakow—all our meetings on various occasions—the numerous talks that had their beginning right from the years in the Seminary—the meetings of priests—ordination groups of each of the seminary classes, to which I was always invited and in which I took part with joy and benefit!

It will certainly not be possible to transfer all that here, in the new conditions of work, but we must do our utmost to be close, to form the "unum", priestly communion, composed of all the diocesan and religious clergy, and of all the priests from various parts of the world who work in the Roman Curia and who also dedicate themselves solicitously to the pastoral ministry. This communion of priests among themselves and with the bishop is the fundamental condition of union among the whole People of God. It constructs its unity in pluralism and in Christian solidarity. The union of priests with the bishop must become the source of the mutual union of priests among themselves and of groups of priests. This union, at the basis of which we find awareness of our own great mission, is expressed by means of the exchange of services and experiences, availability for collaboration, commitment in all pastoral activities, both in the parish and in catechesis, or in guiding the apostolic action of the laity.

Dear Brothers, we must love our priesthood from the bottom of our heart, as a great "social sacrament". We must love it as the essence of our life and of our vocation, as the basis of our Christian and human identity. None of us can be divided in himself. The sacramental priesthood, the ministerial priesthood, calls for particular faith, for particular commitment of all the forces of body and soul, for special awareness of one's vocation, as an exceptional vocation. Each of us must thank Christ on his knees for the gift of this vocation: "What shall I render to the Lord for all his bounty to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord." (Psalm 116.)

We must take, dear Brothers, "the cup of salvation". We are necessary for men, we are immensely necessary, and not part-time, not half-time, like "employees"! We are necessary as those who bear witness and reawaken in others the need to testify. And if it may sometimes seem that we are not necessary, it means that we must begin to bear witness more clearly, and then we will see how much the modern world needs our priestly testimony, our service, our priesthood.

We must give and offer the men of our time, our faithful, the people of Rome, this testimony of

ours with our whole human existence, with our whole being. Priestly testimony, yours, beloved priest confrère, and mine, involves the whole of our person. Yes, the Lord seems, in fact, to speak to us: "I need your hands to continue to bless, / I need your lips to continue to speak, / I need your body to continue to suffer. / I need your heart to continue to love, / I need you to continue to save." (Michel Quoist, *Preghiere*).

Let us not deceive ourselves that we are serving the Gospel if we try to "water down" our priestly charism through exaggerated interest in the vast field of temporal problems, if we wish to "secularize" our way of living and acting, if we cancel even the external signs of our priestly vocation. We must keep the sense of our singular vocation, and this "singularity" must be expressed, also in our exterior garb. Let us not be ashamed of it! Yes, we are in the world! But we are not of the world!

The Second Vatican Council recalled to us this splendid truth regarding the "universal priesthood" of the whole People of God, which is derived from participation in the one priesthood of Jesus Christ. Our "ministerial" priesthood, rooted in the Sacrament of Holy Orders, differs essentially from the universal priesthood of the faithful. And it was constituted in order to enlighten more effectively our brothers and sisters who live in the world—that is, the laity—about the fact that in Jesus Christ we are all a "kingdom of priests" for the Father. The priest reaches this purpose through the ministry of the word and of the sacraments, which is specifically his, and above all through the eucharistic sacrifice, for which he alone is authorized; the priest realizes all this also through a suitable lifestyle. Therefore our priesthood must be clear and expressive. And if, in the tradition of our Church it is closely linked with celibacy, this is due precisely to the clarity and "evangelical" expressiveness referred to in Our Lord's words on celibacy "for the kingdom of heaven" (cf. Mt 19:12).

The Second Vatican Council and one of the first Synods of Bishops, that of 1971, gave great attention to the above-mentioned questions. We recall, moreover, that, during this Synod, Pope Paul VI raised to the altars blessed Maximilian Kolbe, a priest. Today I wish to refer to all that was stated then, as well as to this priestly testimony of my fellow-countryman.

I would like to entrust to you yet another problem which I have particularly at heart: priestly vocations for this dear City of ours and beloved diocese of Rome! Share this concern and solicitude of mine, dear priests! Go back to your most personal memories. At the beginning of your vocation is there not, perhaps, an exemplary priest who guided you in your first steps towards the priesthood? Is not your first thought, your first desire to follow the Lord, linked, perhaps, with the concrete person of a priest-confessor, a priest-friend? Let your grateful thought, your heart overbrimming with thankfulness, go back to this priest. Yes, the Lord needs intermediaries, instruments, to make his voice, his call, heard. Dear Priests, offer yourselves to the Lord to be his instruments in calling new workers to his vineyard. There is no lack of generous youths.

With great humility and love I ask Christ, the One Eternal Priest, through the intercession of his Mother and ours, so venerated in the image known all over the world as "Salus Populi Romani", that our common priestly and pastoral service in this diocese, the most venerable one in the Universal Church, may be blessed and bear abundant fruit. Referring then to Jesus Christ's priestly prayer, I end with these words: "Holy Father, keep them in thy name which thou hast given me, that they may be one... and none of them is lost... that they may be consecrated in truth" (Jn 17: 11,19).

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