



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE COUNCIL OF THE GENERAL SECRETARIAT
OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS**

Saturday, 16 December 1978

Revered Brothers,

I am indeed overcome with joy because it has been given to me to speak to you today. For the Council of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops is a body that is both dear and familiar to me. It is really the circle in which I grew in maturity, as it were. Allow me to recall that after the last session of the Synod of Bishops held in the month of October 1977 I was re-appointed as a member of the same Council for a further period of three years.

If, as the result of another decision which the College of Cardinals took on the sixteenth of October of this year, my mandate has ceased to exist, nevertheless I feel that I am closely connected with the Council. For this reason—I like to repeat something which pleases me—I am very happy to see you. What you put before me is also a part—perhaps not a very small part—of my own personal experience.

Indeed this experience actually expresses the teaching of the Second Vatican Council on the collegiality of bishops. This collegiality, however, becomes daily more urgent in the very life of the Church of our time.

There is re-echoed what John Paul I said in his first address when he uttered these words: "We greet all the bishops of the Church of God, 'each of whom represents his own Church, whereas all together with the Pope, represent the entire Church in a bond of peace, love and unity' (*Lumen Gentium*, 23) and whose collegiality we very much wish to strengthen." (John Paul I, *Urbi et Orbi Radiomessage*, 27 August 1978). This very statement was confirmed a few weeks later by his successor in his first address and in these words: "We particularly urge a deeper reflection on the

implications of the bond of collegiality. By it the bishops are closely linked with the Successor of the blessed Peter and all work together in order to fulfil the high offices entrusted to them: offices of enlightening the whole People of God with the light of the Gospel, of sanctifying them with the means of grace, and of governing them with pastoral skill. Undoubtedly, this collegiality extends also to the appropriate development of institutes—some new, some brought up to date—by which is procured the greatest unity in outlook, intent, and activity in the work of building up the body of Christ. In this regard we make special mention of the Synod of Bishops." (John Paul II, *First Urbi et Orbi Radiomessage*, 17 October 1978).

The principle concerning collegiality laid down by the Council, can without doubt be expressed and put into effect in various ways. My illustrious predecessor, Paul VI, spoke of this theme when he addressed the Fathers who had come together for the Extraordinary Synod in the year 1969. "We believe," he said, "that we have already given proof of this will to give practical increase to episcopal collegiality, both by instituting the Synod of Bishops, in recognising the Episcopal Conferences, and in associating some Brothers in the Episcopate and Pastors residing in their dioceses with the ministry that belongs to our Roman Curia; and if the grace of the Lord assists us and brotherly concord facilitates our mutual relations, the exercise of collegiality in other canonical forms will be able to have wider development ... the Synod ... will be able to throw light on the existence and the growth of episcopal collegiality in suitable canonical terms and at the same time strengthen the teaching of the First and the Second Vatican Councils concerning the power of Saint Peter's successor and that of the College of Bishops with the Pope, its Head." (AAS, LXI, 1969, pp. 717-718.) All the previous sessions dealt with these matters which are very effective in realising in the practical life that plan for the renewal of the Church which is contained in the teaching of the Second Vatican Council.

The themes which were discussed in the last two sessions of the Synod of Bishops make this clear to us. The principal question and, as it were, the crux of the matter, seems to be evangelization. This is immediately followed by catechesis, by which evangelization becomes especially effective. The fruit of the first Synod held in the year 1974 was the Apostolic Exhortation Paul VI "*Evangelii Nuntiandi*". But the fruit of the Synod held in the year 1977, has not yet appeared, I hope that it will be published in the early part of next year. We certainly need documents of this kind, which spring from the fruitful, and at times difficult, practical life of the Church, and which, conversely, give new growth to that same life.

We are certainly convinced of the great importance of the theme "The Role of the Christian Family in the World of Today" which has been proposed for the Synod to be held in the year 1980. This theme is not unconnected with the previous ones; it moves in the same furrow, as it were. However, it must be observed that the family is not only the "object" of evangelization and catechesis, it is also and indeed above all the "fundamental subject" of evangelization. This is gathered from the whole teaching of the Second Vatican Council about the People of God and the apostolate of the laity. This is the main field, as it were, in which the same teaching is put into

practice and consequently where the renewal of the Church according to the mind of the same Council is brought about.

Certainly, Revered Brothers, you have to take upon yourselves and to endure a heavy task! I thank you very much for your diligence especially the Secretary General of the Synod of Bishops, Ladislaus Rubin, Titular Bishop of Serta, and each of the members of the Council of the General Secretariat. Nor do I wish to pass over the "periti" and the officials who have their own duties in the same Secretariat. I encourage you all and I urge you to continue this noble work which in this age brings not a little vitality and growth to the Church.

Finally, as a special mark of our affection for you I willingly impart to you the Apostolic Blessing, as a pledge of heavenly assistance.

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