



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PONTIFICAL SWISS GUARDS**

Tuesday, 6 May 1997

Dear Commandant,

Dear Chaplain,

Officers and Members of the Swiss Guards,

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. It is a great joy for me to greet you in the Apostolic Palace on this special day. I bid a special welcome to the new members of the Guards, for whom this day has special meaning as they swear their solemn oath. I am happy that so many relatives have come to Rome to celebrate this festive day. The presence of their parents and family members expresses not only the close relationship of many Swiss Catholics with the Successor of Peter, but also bears witness to the upbringing and the good example by which they have imparted to their sons the Christian faith and the sense of selfless service along life's journey. For this, dear parents, I cordially say to you, "God reward you!".

2. This day also allows us to cast a glance at the past. It was during the Sack of Rome that the Swiss Guards had to prove themselves. They withstood the test and defended the Pope. Many of the guards fought to the death for him. Today you need not fear a Sack of Rome. However, there is the threat of a "sack of the soul". Even in our day many young people are seeking goods and values that do not simply fill their hands, but first and foremost their soul. However, Rome is not only the Eternal City, rich in history, culture and faith; it is also an invitation to life. Use the time and the many opportunities to find a more meaningful life in this city. Make the most of the chance offered you here to expand your cultural, linguistic and spiritual horizons.

3. Today some of you are swearing to fulfil faithfully your service in the Guard and others of you

are renewing your own oath in your hearts; may all of you recall, however, what Jesus confided to his friends: "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Mt 10:28). Jesus invites us to take him as the standard for our life and conduct, just as he chose the heavenly Father as the sole measure and centre of his life.

4. The period you will be spending in Rome is an exceptional time in your life, a time that many people would like to experience. Throughout the year, despite the duties required by your service, I urge you to be vigilant, to hear God's call about the way he wants to take with you today and in the later stages of your life. Live in a spirit of sincere and close brotherhood, as you help each other to grow in faith and to lead a life that corresponds to your mission in the Church. Your training and the service you are called to fulfil are necessary and essential. But it is even more important that you should make the most of the opportunity to strengthen your faith and to love the Church more and more.

On this day, I would also like to express to you all my gratitude for deciding to put yourselves for a while at the service of Peter's Successor and thus to help guarantee the necessary order and security within the territory of Vatican City. One of your duties is to welcome with courtesy and kindness all the pilgrims who speak to you. By doing so, you will give them a friendly and welcoming impression of the Vatican, for you are often the first people to whom visitors speak when they come to visit the Vatican.

5. I address these thoughts particularly to the new recruits who are beginning their service. I would also like to encourage the older Guards always to give good example to their younger companions who are today being enrolled in the Swiss Guards, so they can make valuable progress day by day, at both the human and spiritual level.

To this end I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing to you all, and to all who join you on this special occasion.

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