



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOP OF SAINT-FLOUR
ON THE 1,000th ANNIVERSARY OF THE ELECTION
OF GERBERT OF AURILLAC AS POPE SYLVESTER II**

*To the Most Reverend René Séjourné
Bishop of Saint-Flour*

1. One thousand years ago on 2 April, Gerbert became Pope, taking the name of Sylvester II. In commemoration of this event, I would like to join in thought and prayer with everyone who will be celebrating it in the Diocese of Saint-Flour, especially the participants in the Study Days organized by the Cantal Association. It was the Benedictine monastery founded by St Gerald in Aurillac which accepted the young shepherd, Gerbert, and formed him as a man and a Christian.

2. The monk Gerbert, a remarkable man, dominated his century in an exceptional way. The breadth of his knowledge, his teaching ability, his incomparable erudition, his moral rectitude and his spiritual sense made him a true teacher. Emperors and Popes had recourse to him. Gerbert, a learned humanist and wise philosopher, a true promoter of culture, put his intelligence at the service of the human person. Constantly seeking the truth, he formed his mind and heart by reading secular literature and by meditating on Scripture. Everything interested him; what he did not know, he learned; what he knew, he passed on to others.

With his spirit of openness and great generosity, Gerbert put his knowledge and his moral and spiritual qualities at the service of the human person and the Church. He reminds us that intelligence is a marvellous gift from the Creator, so that man can become more and more responsible each day for the talents he has received and serve others, thereby fulfilling his true vocation.

3. An active and faithful churchman, Gerbert was devoted to serving his brethren. As a true pastor, he defended the Church's interests, fought against simony and protected monasteries against various encroachments. A man of unity and peace, he knew how to reprimand in a fatherly way those who wandered from the right path; he denounced abuses and forgave, to the point of stepping aside to avoid risking divisions. With apostolic zeal, he encouraged the establishment of

the Church in Hungary and Poland. Gerbert was a reformer in his own way, and his awareness of his ministry made him a Pope with a missionary spirit, keen to proclaim the Gospel in word and with his whole life. On the threshold of the third millennium, as wars and violence continue and Christians are still divided, Gerbert's example invites us to be tireless seekers of peace and unity through dialogue, concerned for truth and forgiveness. In this regard, as I have already said in the Apostolic Letter *Tertio millennio adveniente*, the Jubilee must be "a promising opportunity for fruitful cooperation in the many areas which unite us; these are unquestionably more numerous than those which divide us" (n. 16).

4. Gerbert constantly demonstrated his penchant for seeking the truth and his desire to serve it. He showed that man is invited to follow the path which "begins with reason's capacity to rise beyond what is contingent and set out towards the infinite" (Encyclical *Fides et ratio*, n. 24). For Gerbert, as for every believer, truth is revealed in Christ, the eternal Word in whom all things were created, and the incarnate Word who reveals the Father (cf. *ibid.*, n. 34). And this Word in whom we believe enlightens our knowledge of the human person and history, and enables us to discover the salvation and happiness to which we are called.

Today's questions certainly differ from those Gerbert encountered, but his intellectual and spiritual attitude is a call to the Pastors and the faithful of the present age: go in search of the truth; find inner strength in prayer; be concerned for the moral search and serve mankind. May Christians have the same desire as he did: not only to appear in the sight of men to be examples and models, but to be so, thus showing that Christ is the source of happiness!

5. The Church is preparing to celebrate the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, recalling that Christ, the Alpha and the Omega, leads us to the merciful Father. We cannot forget that the first change of millennium brought many hopes. I would like to stress that Sylvester II joined forces with Emperor Otto III to administer Christendom, just as Pope Sylvester I had worked with Emperor Constantine. We must therefore remember that the concern for unity and harmony between peoples was part of Gerbert's thought and must always inspire the Church's action and that of society's leaders. Peace is a common task, and the Church wants to make her contribution, because it is a service to man and therefore to God. While our world, subjected to ever more numerous changes, longs for profound peace, Gerbert leaves us a message which Bishop Paul Lecoq of Saint-Flour, your distant predecessor, summed up in his pastoral letter for the millennium of Pope Sylvester II's birth: "To bring peace, to gather together and to make one in Christ". This peace must be achieved in the most diverse spheres, because man's field of activity varies. This will be possible if human beings refer to the Gospel and to basic human and moral values, with respect for every person.

6. Thus Gerbert's pastoral activity, and not only that of his relatively short pontificate, is impressive for its variety and its timeliness. We can appreciate what he did in his service to Church affairs, his renewal efforts, his concern for communion, his sense of dialogue. These are all aspects which

the Second Vatican Council stressed in view of the new evangelization. May the example of Gerbert, the first French Pope, enlighten us all in our service to the Church and to our brothers and sisters, for the glory of God and the salvation of the world!

As I entrust you to the intercession of the Mother of God and of St Flour, the first evangelizer and patron of your Diocese, I cordially grant my Apostolic Blessing to all your diocesans and to those who will take part in this commemoration.

From the Vatican, 7 April 1999.

JOHN PAUL II

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