



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS NAMED
IN THE COURSE OF THE YEAR 2001**

Thursday, 5 July 2001

Your Eminences,

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

1. I am pleased to address my cordial welcome to you all, new bishops, taking part in the World Study Days promoted by the Congregation for Bishops. I greet Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re, Prefect of the Dicastery, and I thank him for his words to me, expressing your sentiments and confirming your attachment and devotion to the Pope. I also express my grateful appreciation to dear Fr Marcial Maciel for the thoughtful hospitality which the Legionaries of Christ have offered to the Convention's participants during these days of prayer, listening and reflection.

The initiative, which has gathered the most recently appointed bishops in Rome from various parts of the world, deserves a favourable mention. Dear Brothers in the Episcopate, you are meeting in Rome to pause for a fraternal reflection and for serene examination of certain practical topics and problems that are more challenging to a bishop's life. I trust that having been able to listen to the testimonies of certain Pastors who have been bishops for many years, as well as to some who head the offices of the Roman Curia, will be useful to you who have only just taken on this ministry.

2. I know that your meeting has been intended also and above all as a pilgrimage to the tomb of the Apostle Peter, to build up collegial communion among you and with the Successor of Peter, chosen by Christ as the principal and visible foundation of the Church's unity.

For my part, I would like to reassure you of my spiritual closeness and to strengthen you in faith and trust in Jesus Christ, who has called you and made you Pastors of his people in our time.

The assembly during these days will certainly also be an important event of grace that has fostered within you a renewed adherence to your identity. It will be an occasion to think again of how to "rekindle the gift of God" that is within you through the laying on of hands, according to the Apostle Paul's exhortation to Timothy, under the guidance of a "spirit of power and love and self-control" (cf. II Tm 1,6-7).

My dear Brothers, you are the bishops of the beginning of the new millennium! We are, of course, living in a difficult and complex world. This is attested by the series of questions you have treated during these days in the reports and discussions. A bishop's ministry is not under the banner of triumphalism, but rather of the Cross of Christ. Indeed, with the sacrament of Orders, you have been more closely configured to Christ. No difficulty should distress you because Christ is our hope (cf. I Tm 1,1). He walks beside us, yesterday, today and for ever (cf. Heb 13,8). He is with us as the chief Shepherd (cf. I Pt 5,4). It is he who guides his Church to the fullness of truth and life.

3. In exercising your ministry, what must motivate you is a great spirit of service. Today more than ever, the bishop's role should be understood in terms of service. The Council's Decree *Christus Dominus* reminds us: "In exercising his office of father and pastor the bishop should be with his people as one who serves" (n. 16). The bishop is the servant of all. He is at the service of God, and through his love, also of men.

"*The bishop, servant of the Gospel, for the hope of the world*": will be the theme of the 10th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod this coming autumn, on the life and ministry of bishops.

The bishop must exercise his office and his authority as a service to unity and communion. As bishops, we are called to lead the People of God on the paths of holiness; for this reason we must look to Christ as our model. The success of our pastoral ministry cannot be measured in terms of bureaucratic organization or statistical data: holiness is measured by other criteria.

A bishop's task is to be a "living sign of Jesus Christ" (cf. *Lumen gentium*, n. 21 "take the place of Christ himself"), to be a sign of Christ's love for every human person. How effectively we show Christ to the world largely depends on the authenticity of the way in which we follow him.

Personal holiness is the condition for the fruitfulness of our ministry as bishops of the Church. It is our union with Jesus Christ that determines the credibility of our witness to the Gospel and the supernatural effectiveness of our activity and our initiatives. We can only proclaim "the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph 3,8) with conviction if we stay faithful to love and friendship with Christ.

4. Still fresh from your sacramental ordination, you will certainly often think back to that moving moment, remembering the threefold "*munus*" which has been entrusted to you: to be *teachers of the faith* through teaching that truth which you have received and which it is your duty to transmit

with fidelity; to be *stewards of God's mysteries*, for the sanctification of souls; to be *pastors and guides of the People of God*, whom Christ redeemed with his blood. I hope very much that the experience you have had in these days may revive in you that spirit of service which is patterned on Christ the Good Shepherd.

5. Dear bishops, apostolic service, as we well know, brings with it joys and hopes, but also difficulties, anxieties and enormous pastoral challenges. But you *are not alone in your ministry* because, as Successors of the Apostles, you are united with the Pope, the Successor of the Apostle Peter, and with all the members of the College of Bishops, with all the bishops in the world. The immense challenges before us are also great opportunities for the present time.

In thinking over the rich experience of the Jubilee Year which shed light on the greater need for Christ throughout the world, I would also like to entrust to you symbolically the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio ineunte*, which outlines the paths of the Church's journey at this new stage in history, extending her commitment towards new apostolic goals.

To you too, I repeat: "Duc in altum", (cf. Lk 5,4), put out into the deep courageously, your sails unfurled to the breath of the Holy Spirit.

For my part, I embrace you and assure you of my constant remembrance at God's altar, so that he will strengthen the spiritual bond that unites us. Together let us continue to work with renewed enthusiasm in building the kingdom of God and for the hope of the world. The true measure of your success will consist in greater holiness, in a more loving service to those in need, everyone helping "*in caritate et veritate*".

Let us entrust to Mary, Mother of the Church, the resolutions we have made in these days, so that she may be close to you with her maternal protection and make your every pastoral effort fruitful.

With these sentiments, I cordially impart to each one of you a special Apostolic Blessing, which I gladly extend to the communities entrusted to your pastoral care.