



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO A GROUP OF 120 NEWLY APPOINTED BISHOPS
FROM 33 COUNTRIES**

Monday, 23 September 2002

Dear Confreres in the Episcopate!

1. With great joy, I cordially welcome you, young Bishops from various countries in the world, meeting in Rome for the annual convention organized by the Congregation for Bishops. With fraternal affection, I greet you with the words of the Apostle: "Grace to you and peace from God, our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom 1,7).

I thank Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re for his courteous words on your behalf, expressing your firm resolve for full communion with the Successor of Peter.

I am also grateful to the Legionaries of Christ for the generous hospitality they have once again offered the participants in the convention.

I express my thanks for the initiative of holding in Rome this meeting for prayer, reflection on and the study of some of the important commitments, challenges and problems that Bishops are called to face.

2. Dear Brothers in the Episcopate, your meeting with the Pope today belongs with the purpose of your meeting because you view it as a chance for a pilgrimage to the tomb of the Apostle Peter. In fact, it aims at reinforcing the bond of communion with his Successor, who has received the mission of confirming his brethren (cf. Lk 22,32), as the "perpetual and visible principle and foundation of the unity of faith and communion" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 18).

Last year, at the solemn Mass that concluded the Synod on the ministry and life of Bishops, I said:

"Only if a deep and convinced *unity of the Pastors with the Successor of Peter* is clearly discernible and also the unity of the *Bishops with their priests*, can we give a credible reply to the challenges that come from the present social and cultural world" (*Mass for the closure of the Synod of Bishops*, 27 October; *ORE*, 31 October 2001, p. 2).

For my part, I desire to confirm my affection, support and spiritual closeness to you, and assure you that I share in the desires and concerns of your apostolic service at the dawn of the third millennium which started out with problems but could be rather exciting.

3. At the recent Synod, the figure of the Bishop emerged as a Pastor configured to Christ in holiness of life who spends himself generously for his flock. In the sacrament of Orders, through a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit, we have been configured to Christ, the eternal High Priest, Shepherd and Bishop of souls (cf. I Pt 2,25). At the same time, as the Conciliar Decree *Christus Dominus* reminds us, we are appointed for the ministry of teaching, sanctifying and spiritual guidance for building up the Body of Christ that is the Church (cf. *Christus Dominus*, n. 2).

The effectiveness and fruitfulness of our ministry depends largely on our configuration to Christ and on our personal holiness. In the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio ineunte*, I recalled that "all pastoral initiatives must be set in relation to *holiness*" (n. 30). The primary mission of the Pastor is to nurture in all believers a genuine desire for holiness, to which we are all called and in which the aspirations of the human being reach their peak. Our pastoral ministry must aim at this. If holiness is the "high standard" of ordinary Christian living, there is all the more reason that it should shine out in the life of a Bishop, inspiring his entire behaviour (cf. n. 31).

4. Dear Confreres, another priority I want to emphasize is attention to your priests, who are the closest collaborators of your ministry.

Show special affection to your priests and take care of their continuing formation. The spiritual care of his priests is a primary duty for every diocesan bishop. The action of the priest who places his hands in the hands of the Bishop on the day of his priestly ordination, as he professes "filial respect and obedience" to him at first sight can seem a one-way gesture. In reality, the gesture commits them both: priest and Bishop. The young priest chooses to entrust himself to the Bishop and, for his part, the Bishop obliges himself to look after those hands. In this way the bishop becomes responsible for the destiny of those hands he grasps within his own. A priest must be able to feel, especially in moments of difficulty or loneliness, that his hands are held tightly by those of his Bishop.

Moreover, dedicate yourselves enthusiastically to promoting genuine vocations to the priesthood by prayer, the witness of your lives, and pastoral concern.

5. At the heart of your symposium, at the heart of the reflections of these days, is the will to

respond in the best possible way to the mission entrusted to you: to communicate Christ to the human person today in the world today. May the passionate ideal of the Apostle who said: "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel" (I Cor 9,16) be also yours.

Every day we experience that our time, so rich in technical and material means and comforts, is proving dramatically lacking in goals, values and ideals. The person today, bereft of fundamental values, often withdraws into narrow and relative horizons. In this agnostic and at times hostile situation, the mission of a Bishop is not easy. However, we must not give in to pessimism and discouragement, because it is the Spirit who guides the Church and with his life-giving breath, gives her the courage to dare to seek new methods of evangelization, to be able to reach still unexplored areas. The Christian truth is attractive and persuasive primarily because it can impress a strong direction upon human life by proclaiming in a convincing way that Christ is the only Saviour of humanity. This proclamation is still as effective today as it was in the days of the early Christians, when they undertook first great missionary expansion of the Gospel.

6. My dear new Bishops, in these days you have been able to listen to the witness of Bishops who are already experienced in episcopal service and to the Heads of the Congregations and Councils of the Roman Curia for a calm examination of some subjects and the practical problems most challenging to the life of a Bishop. I certainly hope that this experience may help awaken in you, on whom the apostolic mandate has been recently conferred, generosity and greatness of soul, giving a new impetus to your ministry.

With you, I remember to the Lord each one of your Churches, your beloved priests, deacons, seminarians, the men and women religious, the lay faithful and their families and the entire People of God.

As I entrust your apostolic mission to the intercession of the Virgin Mary, I impart my Apostolic Blessing to you all, as a pledge of continuous divine help.