



The Holy See

JUBILEE OF UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Sunday 10 September 2000

1. "He has done all things well; he even makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak" (*Mk 7:37*). In the Jubilee context of this celebration we are invited in the first place to share in the wonder and praise of those who witnessed the miracle which we have just heard recounted in the Gospel. Like many other episodes of healing, it testifies to the coming of the Kingdom of God in the person of Jesus. In Christ the messianic promises spoken by the prophet Isaiah are fulfilled: "The ears of the deaf shall be unstopped ... and the tongue of the dumb sing for joy" (*Is 35:5-6*). In him, the year of the Lord's favour has begun for all humanity (cf. *Lk 4:17-21*). This year of favour crosses the centuries, it has marked all of history, it is the principle of resurrection and life, which affects not only humanity but creation itself (cf. *Rom 8:19-22*). We are present here for a renewed experience of this year of favour, at this Jubilee of Universities, at which you - distinguished Rectors, Teachers, Administrators and Chaplains from various countries; and you, dear students from all over the world - are gathered. I extend cordial greetings to all of you. I thank the concelebrating Cardinals and Bishops for their presence. I also greet the Minister for Universities and the other Authorities present.

2. "Ephphatha, be opened!" (*Mk 7:34*). The words spoken by Jesus at the healing of the deaf mute ring out once more for us today; they are stimulating words of great symbolic intensity which call us to open ourselves to listening and to bearing witness. Does not the deaf mute mentioned in the Gospel bring to mind the situation of those who are unable to establish a communication which gives true meaning to life? In a certain way, he reminds us of those who shut themselves up in a presumed autonomy, which leaves them isolated from God and often from their neighbour as well. Jesus turns to this man to restore to him the capacity to open himself to the One who is Other and to others, in an attitude of trust and freely-given love. He offers him the extraordinary opportunity to meet God who is love and who allows himself to be known by those who love. He offers him salvation. Yes, Christ opens man to a knowledge of both God and himself. He who is truth (cf. *Jn 14:6*) opens man to the truth, touching him from within and thus healing "from within" every human faculty. For you, dear Brothers and Sisters engaged in research and study, these words are an appeal to open your spirit, to the truth which sets free! At the same time, Christ's words summon you to become this "Ephphatha" for countless hosts of young people, to become this word which opens the spirit to every aspect of truth in the different fields of learning. Seen in this light, your daily commitment becomes a following of Christ on the path of service to your brothers and sisters in the truth of love. Christ is the one who

"has done all things well" (Mk 7:37). He is the model to whom you must look unceasingly so that your academic activity becomes an effective service of the human longing for an ever fuller knowledge of truth.³ "Say to those who are of a fearful heart: `Be strong, fear not! Behold your God ... He will come and save you'" (Is 35:4). In these words of Isaiah your mission too, dear University men and women, is well delineated. Every day you are committed to proclaiming, defending and spreading the truth. Often this involves truths concerning the most diverse aspects of the cosmos and of history. The subject material will not always touch directly on the problem of the ultimate meaning of life and the relationship with God, as in the areas of philosophy and theology. However, this problem abides as the larger context of every thought. Even in research on areas of life which seem quite far from faith there is a hidden desire for truth and meaning which goes beyond the particular and the contingent. When the human person is not spiritually "deaf and dumb" every area of thought, science and experience also brings a reflection of the Creator and gives rise to a desire for him, a desire often hidden and perhaps also repressed but which cannot be suppressed. This was well understood by Saint Augustine who exclaimed: "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you" (*Confessions*, I, 1). As scholars and teachers who have opened your hearts to Christ, your vocation is that of living and bearing witness in an effective way to this relationship between the individual branches of knowledge and that supreme "knowledge" which concerns God, and which in a sense coincides with him, with his Word made flesh and with the Spirit of truth given by him. Through your contribution, the University becomes the place of the "Ephphatha" where Christ - at work in you - continues to carry out the miracle of opening ears and lips, bringing about a new capacity for listening and a true communication. Freedom of research has nothing to fear from this encounter with Christ. Nor does this encounter compromise dialogue and respect for individuals, since Christian truth by its nature is to be proposed, never imposed, and has as its solid point of reference a deep respect for the "sanctuary of conscience" (*Redemptoris Missio*, 39; cf. *Redemptor Hominis*, 12; Vatican II, *Dignitatis Humanae*, 3).⁴ Ours is a time of great transformations which also involve the university world. The humanistic character of culture sometimes seems relegated to the periphery, while there is an increased tendency to reduce the horizon of knowledge to what can be measured and to ignore any question touching on the ultimate meaning of reality. We can ask ourselves what kind of men and women are being prepared by the University today. To meet the challenge of creating a new authentic and integral humanism, the University needs people attentive to the word of the only Teacher; it needs qualified professionals and credible witnesses to Christ. This mission is certainly not easy, it requires constant commitment, it is nourished by prayer and study, and it is expressed in the normal events of everyday life. This mission is supported by the pastoral care of university students and personnel, which involves both the spiritual care of individuals and effective activity promoting cultural initiatives in which the light of the Gospel directs and humanizes the paths of research, study and teaching methods. At the heart of such pastoral activity are university chaplaincy centres where teachers, students and staff find support and help for their Christian lives. As significant places in the University setting, they nourish the commitment of each individual according to the forms and ways suggested by the university context: they are places of the spirit, gymnasiums for the Christian virtues, open and inviting houses, dynamic centres which encourage the Christian animation of culture in respectful and honest dialogue, with clear and purposeful direction (cf. 1 Pt 3:15), and with a witness which is both truth-seeking and convincing.⁵ Dear friends, it is a great joy for me to celebrate the Jubilee of Universities with you. This large and distinguished gathering is an eloquent sign of the cultural fruitfulness of faith. Fixing our gaze on the mystery of the Incarnate Word (cf. Bull *Incarnationis Mysteriorum*), man discovers himself (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 22). He also experiences an intimate joy which finds expression in the interior style itself of studying and teaching. Knowledge thus overcomes the limits which reduce it to a merely functional and pragmatic process, and so it recovers its dignity as research in the service of man in the whole truth about himself, illuminated and guided by the Gospel. Dear Teachers and Students, this is your vocation: make the

University an environment where knowledge is cultivated, a place where the individual finds direction for the future, knowledge, inspiration for effective service of society. I entrust your journey to Mary, *Sedes Sapientiae*, whose image I entrust to you today, so that she may be welcomed as a teacher and a pilgrim in the university campuses of the world. Mary supported the Apostles with her prayer at the dawn of evangelization; may she also help you to invigorate the university world with a Christian spirit. © Copyright 2000 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

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