



The Holy See

JUBILEE OF BISHOPS

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Sunday 8 October 2000

1. *"Teach us, O God, wisdom of heart" (Responsorial Psalm; Italian Lectionary).*

Today St Peter's Square is *like a great Upper Room*: for it is hosting Bishops from every part of the world, who have come to Rome to celebrate their Jubilee. The memory of the Apostle Peter, called to mind by his tomb beneath the altar of the great Vatican Basilica, invites us to return in spirit *to the first site of the Apostolic College*, to that Upper Room in Jerusalem where I recently had the joy of celebrating Mass during my pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

Today a spiritual bridge spanning centuries and continents links the Upper Room with this square, where the *successors of those first Apostles of Christ* have gathered in the Holy Year 2000. I offer my cordial embrace to you all, dear and venerable Brothers, and I extend it with equal affection to all who have been unable to come but are spiritually united with us in their sees.

Together let us make our own the invocation of the Psalm: "Teach us, O God, wisdom of heart". In this "*sapientia cordis*", which is God's gift, we can sum up the fruit of our Jubilee gathering. It consists in our interior conformation to Christ, the Wisdom of the Father, through the action of the Holy Spirit. To receive this gift, indispensable if we are to govern the Church well, we, her Pastors, must first pass through him, "the door of the sheep" (*Jn 10: 7*). We must imitate him, the "Good Shepherd" (*Jn 10: 11, 14*), so that in listening to us the faithful will listen to him, and in following us they can follow him, the one Saviour, yesterday, today and forever.

2. God gives wisdom of heart *through his Word*, living, effective and capable of laying bare the depths of man - as the author of the Letter to the Hebrews told us (cf. *Heb 4: 12*) in the passage just proclaimed. The divine Word, after being spoken "of old in many and various ways to our fathers through the prophets" (*Heb 1: 1*), has been sent in these last days to men and women in the very person of the Son (cf. *Heb 1: 2*).

We Pastors, by virtue of the *munus docendi*, are called to be qualified preachers of this Word. "He who hears you hears me" (Lk 10: 16). An *exhilarating task*, but also a *great responsibility!* We have been entrusted with a living word: we must therefore proclaim it by our lives even before with our lips. It is a word that coincides with the person of Christ himself, the "Word made flesh" (Jn : 14): it is therefore *the face of Christ* that we must show men; *his Cross* that we must proclaim, doing so as vigorously as Paul: "I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor 2: 2).

3. "Lo, we have left everything and followed you" (Mk 10: 28). Peter's statement expresses the radicalness of the choice requested of the apostle. A radicalness which becomes clear in the light of Jesus' demanding conversation with the rich young man. The Teacher indicated the observance of the commandments to him as a condition for eternal life. To his desire for greater perfection, he answered with a loving look and an unconditional proposal: "Go, sell what you have, and give to the poor; and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me" (Mk 10: 21). The sadness of refusal fell on these words of Christ like a sudden darkening of the sky. It was then that Jesus spoke one of his severest sayings: "How hard it will be for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!" (Mk 10: 24). A saying which he himself mitigated in the face of the Apostles' dismay: "all things are possible with God" (Mk 10: 27).

Peter's statement became an expression of the grace by which God transforms man and makes him capable of a total gift. "We have left everything and followed you" (Mk 10: 28). *This is how we become apostles.* And this is how we also experience the fulfilment of Christ's promise about the "hundredfold": the apostle who has left everything to follow Christ already lives a fulfilled and joyful life on this earth, despite the inevitable trials.

At this moment how can we not express, venerable Brothers, *our gratitude to the Lord for the gift of our vocation*, first to the priesthood and then to its fullness in the Episcopate? Looking back over the events of our lives, emotion fills our hearts at seeing the many ways in which the Lord has shown us his love and mercy. Truly, "*miserordias Domini in aeternum cantabo!*" (Ps 89 [88]: 2).

4. The Bishop, a successor of the Apostles, is *someone for whom Christ is everything*: "For to me to live is Christ..." (Phil 1: 21). He must bear *witness to this in all his actions*. The Second Vatican Council teaches: "Bishops should devote themselves to their apostolic office as witnesses of Christ to all men" (Decree *Christus Dominus*, n. 11).

In speaking of the Bishops as witnesses, I cannot fail to recall at this solemn Jubilee celebration the many *Bishops* who, in the course of two millennia, have borne the supreme witness to Christ of martyrdom, following the apostolic model and making the Church fruitful by the shedding of their blood.

In a particular way, the 20th century *has been richly blessed with such witnesses*, some of whom I have had the joy of raising to the honours of the altar. A week ago, I *enrolled among the saints* four Bishops, martyrs in China: Gregory Grassi, Anthony Fantosati, Francis Fogolla and Louis Versiglia. Among the *blesseds*, we venerate Michal Kozal, Antoni Julian Nowowiejski, Leon Wetmanski and Wladyslaw Goral, who died in Nazi concentration camps. In addition to them are Diego Ventaja Milán, Manuel Medina Olmos, Anselmo Polanco and Florentino Asensio Barroso, killed during the Spanish Civil War. And in Eastern Europe the blessed martyrs Vilmos Apor, a Hungarian, Vincent Eugene Bossilkov, a Bulgarian, and Alojzije Stepinac, a Croatian, blossomed in the long winter of communist totalitarianism.

At the same time, it is beautiful and only right to thank God for all the *wise and generous Pastors* who, down the centuries, have brought honour to the Church by their teaching and example. How many holy and blessed *confessors* there are among the Bishops! I am thinking, for example, of shining figures such as Charles Borromeo and Francis de Sales; I am also thinking of Popes Pius IX and John XXIII, whom I recently had the joy of proclaiming blessed.

Dear Brothers, "surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses" (*Heb 12: 1*), *let us renew our response to the gift of God* received with episcopal ordination. "Let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus" (*Heb 12: 1-2*), the Shepherd of shepherds.

5. Reflecting on the mystery of the Church and her mission in the contemporary world, the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council felt the need to devote special attention to the pastoral office of Bishops. Today, on the threshold of the third millennium, the challenge of the *new evangelization* further emphasizes the episcopal ministry: the Pastor is the first to take responsibility for and to encourage the ecclesial community, both in the requirement of communion and in missionary outreach. Regarding the relativism and subjectivism which mar so much of contemporary culture, *Bishops are called to defend and promote the doctrinal unity* of their faithful. Concerned for every situation in which the faith has been lost or is unknown, they work with all their strength for *evangelization*, preparing priests, religious and lay people for this task and making the necessary resources available (cf. *Christus Dominus*, n. 6).

Mindful of the Council's teaching (cf. *ibid.*, n. 7), today we would like to express from this square our fraternal *solidarity with Bishops who have been persecuted*, who are in prison or are prevented from exercising their ministry. And in the name of our sacramental bond, we affectionately extend our remembrance and prayer *to our brother priests who are suffering the same trials*. The Church is grateful to them for the inestimable good that they bring to the Mystical Body by their prayer and sacrifice.

6. "*May the gracious care of the Lord our God be ours; prosper the work of our hands for us! Prosper the work of our hands!*" (Ps 90 [89]: 17).

During our Jubilee, dear Brothers in the Episcopate, the gracious care of the Lord has been given to us in abundance. The light and strength which come from it will not fail to prosper the "work of our hands", that is, the work entrusted to us in God's field which is the Church.

For our support and comfort, we have wished to emphasize during these Jubilee days the presence in our midst of Mary Most Holy, our Mother. We did so yesterday evening by reciting the Rosary as a community; we do so today with the *Act of Entrustment*, which we will make at the end of Mass. It is an act that we will make in a *collegial spirit*, while sensing the closeness of the many Bishops who, in their respective sees, are joining in our celebration and making this same Act together with their faithful. May the venerable image of Our Lady of Fátima, which we have the joy of hosting in our midst, help us to relive the experience of the first Apostolic College, gathered in prayer in the Upper Room with Mary, the Mother of Jesus.

Queen of Apostles, pray with us and for us, so that the Holy Spirit will descend in abundance upon the Church, and that she will shine throughout the world ever more united, holy, catholic and apostolic. Amen.

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