



The Holy See

SOLEMNITY OF THE HOLY APOSTLES PETER AND PAUL

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Friday, 29 June 2001

1. *"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Mt 16,16).*

How many times have we repeated this profession of faith, pronounced once by Simon, son of John, in the region of Caesarea Philippi. How many times have I found in these words an interior support for continuing on the mission that Providence has entrusted to me.

You are the Christ. The entire Holy Year brought us to fix our attention on "Jesus Christ, the only Saviour, yesterday, today and forever". Every Jubilee celebration was an *unceasing profession of faith in Christ*, renewed in a unanimous way for the 2,000 years that have passed since the Incarnation. To the ever present question of Jesus to his disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" (*Mt 16,15*), Christians of the Year 2000 have still replied joining with Peter, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God".

2. *"Blessed are you, Simon, son of John, because flesh and blood have not revealed it to you, but my Father who is in heaven" (Mt 16,17).*

After 2,000 years, the "rock" on which the Church is founded remains ever the same: it is the faith of Peter. "On this rock" (*Mt 16,18*) Christ founded his Church, spiritual edifice which has withstood the wear and tear of the centuries. Certainly, if it had been built on simply human and historical foundations, it would not have been able to resist the assaults of so many enemies.

In the course of the centuries, the Holy Spirit has enlightened men and women of every age, vocation and social condition, to make of them the "living stones" (1 *Peter 2,5*) of this edifice. They are the saints, whom God raises up with unending creativity, who are much more numerous than

those the Church selects as examples for all. One faith, one "rock", one cornerstone: Christ, Redeemer of mankind.

"Blessed are you, Simon son of John". *Simon's blessedness is the same as that of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, to whom Elizabeth said, "Blessed is she who believed that the word of the Lord would be fulfilled" (Lk 1,45).

It is the blessedness given to the community of believers today, to whom Jesus repeats: *Blessed are you Church of the Year 2000*, who keep intact the Gospel and continue to present it with renewed enthusiasm to the men and women of the beginning of the new millennium.

In the faith, fruit of the mysterious union between divine grace and human humility which trusts in grace, lies the secret of the interior peace and joy of heart which in some way anticipate the beatitude of heaven.

3. "I have fought the good fight, I have ended my course, I have kept the faith" (2 Tim 4,7). *Faith is "preserved" by being given* (Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris missio*, n. 2). It is Paul's teaching. This took place when on Pentecost the disciples left the Upper Room and, driven by the Holy Spirit, went out in every direction. The evangelizing mission continues in time and is *the normal way* in which the Church handles the treasure of faith. We must be active participants in this spiritual energy.

With these sentiments I direct warm greetings to you, beloved and venerable Brothers, who today concelebrate with me. In a special way, I greet you *Metropolitan Archbishops*, named in the course of the year, who have come to Rome for the traditional imposition of the pallium. You come from *21 countries on five continents*. On your faces I contemplate the countenance of your communities: an immense richness of faith and history, which makes up the People of God and comes together in a symphonic harmony.

I greet you, young Bishops, ordained in the course of the year. You too come from many parts of the world. In the varied members of the ecclesial body, which you represent, there are hopes and joys, but certainly *there are not lacking many wounds*. I think of poverty, conflicts and even sometimes of persecutions. I think of the temptation to secularism, indifference and practical materialism which undermine the witness of the Gospel. Beloved brothers in the Episcopate, these should not weaken but rather intensify our burning desire to bring the Good News of the love of God to every human being.

We pray that the faith of Peter and Paul sustain our common witness and, if necessary, make us ready even to undergo martyrdom.

4. It was martyrdom itself which sealed the witness to Christ rendered by the two Apostles whose

feast we celebrate today. With the difference of a few years between their deaths, they shed their blood here in Rome, consecrating it once and for all to Christ. Peter's martyrdom sealed the vocation of Rome as the seat of his successors in the primacy Christ conferred on him for the service of the Church: *service of the faith, service of unity, service of the mission* (cf. Encyclical Letter, *Ut unum sint*, n. 88).

The yearning for total fidelity to the Lord is urgent; the desire for the full unity of all believers becomes ever more intense. I realize that "after centuries of bitter controversies, the other Churches and Ecclesial Communities are more and more taking a fresh look at this ministry of unity" (*ibid.*, n. 89). That is true in a particular way of the Orthodox Churches, as I was able to observe in the past few days, *in the course of my visit in Ukraine*. How much I desire that the time of reconciliation and of reciprocal community might be hastened.

In this spirit I am pleased to direct *my warm greeting to the Delegation of the Patriarchate of Constantinople*, guided by His Eminence, Jeremias, Metropolitan of France and Exarch of Spain, whom the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I sent for the celebration of Sts Peter and Paul. Their presence adds a special note of joy to our celebration. May the holy Apostles intercede for us, so that our joint efforts may be able to hasten to prepare the recomposition of that full and harmonious unity, which should characterize the Christian community in the world. When this comes about, it will be easier for the world to recognize the authentic face of Christ.

5. "I have kept the faith" (2 *Tim* 4,7). So affirms the Apostle Paul passing his life in review. We know in what way he kept it: giving it, spreading it, making it as fruitful as possible until his death.

In the same way, the Church is called to preserve the "deposit" of faith by *communicating it to all men and to the entire human person*. For this reason, the Lord sent her into the world, saying to the Apostles, "Go and teach all nations" (*Mt* 28,19). This *missionary mandate* is more valid than ever now at the beginning of the third millennium. More so than before in view of the greatness of the new horizon, it must recover the freshness of the beginning (cf. *Redemptoris missio*, n. 1).

If St Paul were alive today, how would he have expressed the missionary yearning which characterized his activity at the service of the Gospel? And would not St Peter have encouraged him in this generous apostolic enterprise, giving him his right hand as a sign of communion (cf. *Gal* 2,9).

We entrust to the intercession of these two holy Apostles the Church's course at the beginning of the new millennium. We invoke Mary Queen of the Apostles so that everywhere the Christian people may grow in fraternal communion and in missionary zeal.

May the whole community of believers soon proclaim with one heart and one soul: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God". You are our Redeemer, our only Redeemer. Yesterday, today

and forever. Amen.

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