



The Holy See

OPENING OF THE ACADEMIC YEAR OF ECCLESIASTICAL UNIVERSITIES

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Friday 19 October 2001

1. *"Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness"* (Rom 4,3). The words St Paul addressed to the Christian community at Rome, repeated in this evening's liturgy, help us to live more intensely today's annual gathering, that sees the communities of the ecclesiastical universities of the city, gathered for the Eucharistic banquet at the beginning of a new academic year.

In his Letter to the Romans, after having painted a dark and desolate picture of *humanity under the power of sin* and unable to save itself by its own power, the apostle Paul proclaims *the Gospel of justification*, offered by God to all men and women in Christ. In order to expound the basic core of this teaching better, he introduces the example of the faith of Abraham, father of all believers. We are thus led to *the heart of the Christian message*, that proclaims the fulfilment of salvation in the union of the free initiative of God with the necessary response of man, who accepts the gift of God by faith.

The in-depth and articulated Pauline reflection on the Christian mystery is an invitation for all the disciples of the Lord to an ever more satisfactory perception of the teaching of the faith. This invitation *is particularly valid for theologians*, whose mission in the Church, carried out in communion with the legitimate Pastors of the People of God, is exactly that *of contributing with their work to the deeper comprehension of the content of Revelation* and expressing it in a language readily understandable to the men of their time. It is also addressed to *the professors of the various ecclesiastical disciplines*, called to further the communication of the faith and promote the search for truth.

2. With the words of the Apostle, that invite us to imitate the example of Abraham's faith, *I am*

happy to greet cordially all who participate in this solemn Celebration. First of all, I greet Cardinal Zenon Grocholewski, Prefect of the Congregation for Catholic Education, who presides over the Eucharistic Liturgy. I express my gratitude to the Rectors of the ecclesiastical universities, to the Members of the academic faculty, to the Rectors of the seminaries and colleges, and to all who in various forms offer their active collaboration in the spiritual, cultural and human formation of the students and who are present this evening. Finally, I embrace all of you, dear young people, who have the privilege of furthering your cultural and spiritual formation close to the See of Peter. I wish to extend a special word of affection and encouragement to all who are beginning their studies this year in the Roman university community. Be conscious that the commitment and effort of this time dedicated to study, with the light and strength of the grace of God generously accepted and sustained, will bear a good, plentiful harvest, not only for you but also for those whom you will meet in the tasks and responsibilities to which you will be called.

To all of you students, professors, those in charge of spiritual, personal and academic formation I want to express *my profound esteem and my appreciation* for your generous dedication in the academic and educational fields. I sincerely wish that the year, solemnly inaugurated today, will contribute to producing in all the abundant fruit of wisdom and grace.

3. The Second Vatican Council strongly asserted that *the Church is a "mystery of communion"*, deriving from the unity of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (cf. *Lumen gentium*, n. 4; *Unitatis redintegratio*, n. 2). This communion should be understood as the harmonious cooperation of diverse ministries, charisms and gifts, animated by the same Spirit, at the service of the same mission and oriented to the same end. In this organic vision of the unity of the Church, *theological knowledge*, consistent with its own premises, *should be inserted into the vital context of ecclesial communion*. Theological reflection responds essentially to the dynamic of faith and, as a consequence, is an integral part of evangelization. The theologian is called to make his own contribution of research and in-depth study of revealed truth, so that the Gospel of salvation may be understood better and more easily communicated to all men.

Therefore, the theologian, whether doing research or teaching, must always be aware of the *intrinsic ecclesial vocation of his activity*. Analogously, the professors of other ecclesiastical disciplines will be sustained by a strong passion for the truth and by a clear will to serve the evangelizing mission of the Church.

4. So I invite you, dear professors and students of the ecclesiastical universities of Rome, to have an increasing conviction of the importance and sensitivity of your task. Above all be conscious that you are doing your work *with the Church, in the Church and for the Church*. This requires that you be continuously in touch with the *sensus fidei* of the People of God and be attuned to the Magisterium of the Church, that has the precise task of guaranteeing the authenticity and consistency of the teachings imparted with the deposit of faith entrusted by Christ to the Apostles and to their successors.

I especially exhort you students to make the most of the opportunities that are offered to you by the City and the Diocese of Rome. Here, in fact, in addition to the wide choice of university courses open to you, one comes into contact with the living witness of an extraordinary variety of cultures and traditions. All this should put everything into a clear and constructive perspective, that encourages each one to devote his energies to seeking the truth to which all must tend.

5. I cordially hope that your period of study in Rome will help all of you to deepen your feeling of belonging to the Church and help you experience her "catholicity". Through the mystery of the passion, death and resurrection of Christ, God gathers a new People from all the nations of the earth, so that they may announce his wonders in the world and proclaim the joy of salvation to every man and woman. The beatitude proposed to us afresh in the responsorial psalm "Blessed is the man to whom you give salvation" is destined for the whole world.

It is a joyful announcement that waits to be proclaimed "in the light" and to resound "on the housetops" (cf. Lk 12,3), as Jesus reminds us in the Gospel, so that every man and woman can know and welcome it in his life.

The study of theology and of ecclesiastical disciplines is directed to evangelization. May you know how to learn *a rigorous method*, accepting the demands of research with courage and generosity, to experience in first person the fruitful meeting between faith and reason. By these "two wings" you can draw ever nearer to the contemplation of the truth (cf. *Fides et ratio*, Introduction) and make yourselves joyful travelling companions for the men of our time, often perturbed and lost on the roads of the world.

6. "*Fear not, you are of more value than many sparrows*" (Lk 12,7). The words of Jesus, that conclude today's Gospel reading, contain a comforting message of encouragement for the disciples, who listen to them directly from the mouth of the Teacher as they are being prepared to face the difficult and risky mission of witnessing to the Gospel. May they also sustain you, young men, as you begin a new phase of preparation for the mission that the Lord will entrust to you.

May the maternal protection of the Virgin Mary, *Seat of Wisdom*, accompany all of you, teachers and disciples, in this academic year and teach each of you to keep and meditate, in a pure and ready heart, the proclamation of the Gospel (cf. Lk 2,19. 51).

May Mary Our Lady, welcoming and receptive mother of the Word made flesh, always guide and protect you on your quest for full and perfect understanding of the truth, Amen!

The Holy Father concluded with the auspicious words:

Allow me to recall the time when I was Bishop of Kraków. Today and tomorrow we celebrate St John Cantius, who in the Medieval period was a professor at the University of Kraków. This day,

20 October, is the day the academic year begins in the schools of that city, especially in the famous Jagiellonian University. Remembering this day of inauguration in Kraków and the inauguration we are celebrating today in Rome, I want to wish all the academic centres of the Church in every part of the world the blessing of the Lord for a new academic year.

Praised be Jesus Christ!