



The Holy See

FIRST RADIOMESSAGE "URBI ET ORBI"

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Sistine Chapel

Tuesday, 17 October 1978

Our Venerable Brothers, beloved children of Holy Church, and all men of goodwill who listen to us! One expression only, among so many others, comes immediately to our lips at this moment, as after our election to the See of the Blessed Peter, we present ourselves to you. The expression, which, in evident contrast with our obvious limitations as a human person, highlights the immense burden and office committed to us, is this: "O the depth... of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!" (Rom 11:33). In fact, who could have foreseen, after the death of Pope Paul VI whom we always remember, the premature decease of his most amiable successor, John Paul I? How could we have been able to foresee that this formidable heritage would have been placed on our shoulders? For this reason, it is necessary for us to meditate upon the mysterious design of the provident and good God, not indeed in order to understand, but, rather, that we may worship and pray. Truly we feel the need to repeat the words of the Psalmist who, raising his eyes aloft, exclaimed: "From whence does my help come? My help comes from the Lord" (Ps 120:1-2). These totally unforeseen events, happening in so brief a time, and the inadequacy with which we can respond to that invitation impel us to turn to the Lord and to trust completely to him. But they also prevent us from outlining a programme for our Pontificate which would be the fruit of long reflection and of precise elaboration. But to make up for this, there is to hand a certain compensation, as it were, which is itself a sign of the strengthening presence of God. It is less than a month since all of us, both inside and outside these historic walls of the Sistine Chapel, heard Pope John Paul speaking at the very beginning of his ministry, from which one might have hoped much. Both on account of the memory that is yet fresh in the mind of each one of us and on account of the wise reminders and exhortations contained in the allocution, we consider that we cannot overlook it. That same address, as in the circumstances in which it was given, is truly apposite and clearly maintains its validity here and now at the start of this new pontifical ministry to which we are bound and which, before God and the Church, we cannot avoid. We wish, therefore, to clarify some basic points which we consider to be of special importance. Hence—as we propose and as, with the help of God, we confidently trust—we shall continue these not merely with earnestness and attention but we shall also further them with constant pressure, so that ecclesial life, truly lived, may correspond to them. First of all, we wish to point out the unceasing importance of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, and we accept the definite duty of assiduously bringing it into effect. Indeed, is not that universal Council a kind of milestone as it were, an event of the utmost

importance in the almost two thousand year history of the Church, and consequently in the religious and cultural history of the world? However, as the Council is not limited to the documents alone, neither is it completed by the ways applying it which were devised in these post-conciliar years. Therefore we rightly consider that we are bound by the primary duty of most diligently furthering the implementation of the decrees and directive norms of that same Universal Synod. This indeed we shall do in a way that is at once prudent and stimulating. We shall strive, in particular, that first of all an appropriate mentality may flourish. Namely, it is necessary that, above all, outlooks must be at one with the Council so that in practice those things may be done that were ordered by it, and that those things which lie hidden in it or—as is usually said—are "implicit" may become explicit in the light of the experiments made since then and the demands of changing circumstances. Briefly, it is necessary that the fertile seeds which the Fathers of the Ecumenical Synod, nourished by the word of God, sowed in good ground (cf. Mt 13: 8, 23)—that is, the important teachings and pastoral deliberations should be brought to maturity in that way which is characteristic of movement and life. This general purpose of fidelity to the Second Vatican Council and express will, in so far as we are concerned, of bringing it into effect, can cover various sections: missionary and ecumenical affairs, discipline, and suitable administration. But there is one section to which greater attention will have to be given, and that is the ecclesiological section. Venerable Brethren and beloved sons of the Catholic world, it is necessary for us to take once again into our hands the "Magna Charta" of the Council, that is, the Dogmatic Constitution "*Lumen Gentium*", so that with renewed and invigorating zeal we may meditate on the nature and function of the Church, its way of being and acting. This should be done not merely in order that the vital communion in Christ of all who believe and hope in him should be accomplished, but also in order to contribute to bringing about a fuller and closer unity of the whole human family. John XXIII was accustomed to repeat the following words: "The Church of Christ is the light of the nations." For the Church—his words were repeated by the Council—is the universal sacrament of salvation and unity for the human race. (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 1; 48; *Ad Gentes*, 1). The mystery of salvation which finds its centre in the Church and is actualized through the Church; the dynamism which on account of that same mystery animates the People of God; the special bond, that is, collegiality, which "with Peter and under Peter" binds together the sacred Pastors; all these are major elements on which we have not yet sufficiently reflected. We must do so in order to decide in face of human needs, whether these be permanent or passing, what the Church should adopt as its mode of presence and its course of action. Wherefore, the assent to be given to this document of the Council, seen in the light of Tradition and embodying the dogmatic formulae issued over a century ago by the First Vatican Council, will be to us Pastors and to the faithful a decisive indication and a rousing stimulus, so that—we say it again—we may walk in the paths of life and of history. In order that we may become better informed and more vigilant in undertaking our duty, we particularly urge a deeper reflection on the implications of the collegial bond. By collegiality the Bishops are closely linked with the Successor of the blessed Peter, and all collaborate in order to fulfil the high offices committed to them: offices of enlightening the whole People of God with the light of the Gospel, of sanctifying them with the means of grace, of guiding them with pastoral skill. Undoubtedly, this collegiality extends to the appropriate development of institutes—some new, some updated—by which is procured the greatest unity in outlook, intent, and activity in the work of building up the body of Christ, which is the Church (cf. Eph 4: 12; Col 1:24). In this regard, we make special mention of the Synod of Bishops, set up before the end of the Council by that very talented man, Paul VI (cf. Apostolic Letter, given "motu proprio", *Apostolica Sollicitudo*; AAS LVII, 1965, pp. 775-780). But besides these things, which remind us of the Council, there is the *duty in general of being faithful to the task* we have accepted and to which we ourselves are bound before all others. We, who are called to hold the Supreme Office in the Church, must manifest this fidelity with all our might and for this reason we must be a shining example both in our thinking and in our actions. This indeed must be done because we preserve intact the deposit of faith, because we make entirely our own the commands of Christ, who, after Peter was

made the rock on which the Church was built, gave him the keys of the kingdom of heaven (cf. Mt 16:18-19), who bade him strengthen his brethren (cf. Lk 22:32), and to feed the sheep and the lambs of his flock as a proof of his love (cf. Jn 21:15-17). We are entirely convinced that in no inquiry, which may take place today into the "*ministry of Peter*" as it is called—so that what is proper and peculiar to it may be studied in greater depth every day—can these three important passages of the holy gospel be omitted. For it is a question of the various parts of the office, which are bound up with the very nature of the Church so that its internal unity may be preserved and its spiritual mission placed in safe hands. These parts were not only committed to Saint Peter but also to his lawful successors. We are also convinced that this high office must always be related to love as the source from which it is nourished and as it were the climate in which it can be expanded. This love is as it were a necessary reply to the question of Jesus "Do you love me?" So we are pleased to repeat these words of Saint Paul "The love of Christ constraineth us" (2 Cor 5:14), because we want our ministry to be from the outset a ministry of love, and want to show and declare this in every possible way. In this matter we will strive to follow the meritorious examples of our immediate predecessors. Who does not remember the words of Paul VI who preached "the civilization of love" and almost a month before his death declared in a prophetic way: "I have kept the faith" (cf. *Homily on Feast of SS. Peter and Paul*: AAS LXX, 1978, p. 395), not indeed to praise himself but after fifteen years full of apostolic ministry to examine his conscience more strictly? But what can we say of John Paul I? It seems to us that only yesterday he emerged from this assembly of ours to put on the papal robes—not a light weight. But what warmth of charity, nay, what "an abundant outpouring of love"—which came forth from him in the few days of his ministry and which in his last Sunday address before the *Angelus* he desired should come upon the world. This is also confirmed by his wise instructions to the faithful who were present at his public audiences on faith, hope and love. Beloved brothers in the Episcopate and dear children, fidelity, as is clear, implies not a wavering obedience to the Magisterium of Peter especially in what pertains to doctrine. The "objective" importance of this Magisterium must always be kept in mind and even safeguarded because of the attacks which in our time are being levelled here and there against certain truths of the Catholic faith. Fidelity too implies the observance of the liturgical norms laid down by ecclesiastical Authority and therefore has nothing to do with the practice either of introducing innovations of one's own accord and without approval or of obstinately refusing to carry out what has been lawfully laid down and introduced into the sacred rites. Fidelity also concerns the great discipline of the Church of which our immediate predecessor spoke. This discipline is not of such a kind that it depresses or, as they say, degrades. It seeks to safeguard the right ordering of the mystical body of Christ with the result that all the members of which it is composed united together perform their duties in a normal and natural way. Moreover, fidelity signifies the fulfilment of the demands of the priestly and religious vocation in such a way that what has freely been promised to God will always be carried out in so far as the life is understood in a stable supernatural way. Finally, in so far as the faithful are concerned—as the word itself signifies—fidelity of its very nature must be a duty in keeping with their condition as Christians. They show it with ready and sincere hearts and give proof of it either by obeying the sacred Pastors whom the Holy Spirit has placed to rule the Church of God (cf. Acts 20:28), or by collaborating in those plans and works for which they have been called. Nor at this point must we forget the Brethren of other Churches and Christian confessions. For the cause of ecumenism is so lofty and such a sensitive issue that we may not keep silent about it. How often do we meditate together on the last wish of Christ who asked the Father for the gift of unity for the disciples (cf. in 17:21-23)? Who does not remember how much Saint Paul stressed "the unity of the spirit" from which the followers of Christ might have the same love, being of one accord, of one mind" (cf. Phil 2:2, 5-8)? Therefore one can hardly credit that a deplorable division still exists among Christians. This is a cause of embarrassment and perhaps of scandal to others. And so we wish to proceed along the road which has happily been opened and to encourage whatever can serve to remove the obstacles, desirous as we are, that through common effort full communion

may eventually be achieved. We turn also to all men who as children of almighty God are our brothers whom we must love and serve, to make known to them without any sense of boasting but with sincere humility our intention to really devote ourselves to the continual and special cause of peace, of development and justice among nations. In this matter we have no desire to interfere in politics or to take part in the management of temporal affairs. For just as the Church cannot be confined to a certain earthly pattern, so we in our approach to the urgent questions of men and peoples, are led solely by religious and moral motives. Following him who gave that perfect way to his followers, so that they might be the "salt of the earth" and the "light of the world" (Mt 5:13-16), we wish to strive to strengthen the spiritual foundations on which human society must be based. We feel that this duty is all the more urgent the longer that discords and dissensions last, which in not a few parts of the world, provide material for struggles and conflicts and even give rise to the more serious danger of frightful calamities. Therefore it will be our constant care to direct our attention to questions of this kind and to deal with them by timely action forgetful of our own interests and motivated by the spirit of the Gospel. One may at this point at least share the grave concern which the College of Cardinals during the interregnum expressed concerning the dear land of Lebanon and its people. For it we all greatly desire peace with freedom. At the same time we wish to extend our hand to all peoples and all men at this moment and to open our heart to all who are oppressed, as they say, by any injustice or discrimination with regard to either economic or social affairs, or even to political matters, or even to freedom of conscience and the freedom to practice their religion which is their due. We must aim at this: that all forms of injustice, which exist today, should be given consideration by all in common and should be really eradicated from the world, so that all men may be able to live a life worthy of man. This also belongs to the mission of the Church which has been explained in the Second Vatican Council, not only in the dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* but also in the pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*. Brothers, dear sons and daughters, the recent happenings of the Church and of the world are for us all a healthy warning: how will our pontificate be? What is the destiny the Lord has assigned to his Church in the next years? What road will mankind take in this period of time as it approaches the year 2000? To these bold questions the only answer is: "God knows" (cf. Cor 12:2-3). The course of our life which has brought us unexpectedly to the supreme responsibility and office of apostolic Service is of little interest. Our person—we ought to say—should disappear when confronted with the weighty office we must fill. And so a speech must be changed into an appeal. After praying to the Lord, we feel the need of your prayers to gain that indispensable, heavenly strength that will make it possible for us to take up the work of our predecessors from the point where they left off. After acknowledging their cherished memory, we offer to each one of you, our Venerable Brothers, whom we remember with gratitude, our greeting. We extend a greeting which is both trusting and encouraging to all our brothers in the Episcopate, who in different parts of the world have the care of individual churches, the chosen sections of the People of God (cf. *Christus Dominus*, 11) and who are co-workers with us in the work of universal salvation. Behind them, we behold the order of priesthood, the band of missionaries, the companies of Religious men and women. At the same time we earnestly hope that their numbers will grow, echoing in our mind those words of the Saviour "The harvest is great, the labourers are few" (Mt 9:37-38; Lk 10:2). We behold also the Christian families and communities, the many associations dedicated to the apostolate, the faithful who even if they are not known to us individually, are not anonymous, not strangers, nor even in a lower place, for they are included in the glorious company of the Church of Christ. Among them we look with particular affection on the weak, the poor, the sick, and those afflicted with sorrow. Now, at the beginning of our universal pastoral ministry, we wish to open to them our heart. Do not you, brothers and sisters, share by your sufferings in the passion of our Redeemer, and in a certain way complete it? (cf. Col 1:24). The unworthy successor of St Peter, who proposes to explore "the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph 3:8), has the greatest need of your help, your prayers, your devotedness or "sacrifice", and this he most humbly asks of you. We also wish, most beloved Brothers and sons who hear us, because of our undying love for the

land of our birth, to greet in a very special way all the citizens of Poland, "ever faithful", and the bishops, priests, and people of the Church of Krakow. United in this greeting by an indissoluble bond are memories, affections, the sweet love of the fatherland, and hope. In this grave hour which gives rise to trepidation, we cannot do other than turn our mind with filial devotion to the Virgin Mary, who always lives and acts as a Mother in the mystery of Christ, and repeat the words "Totus tuus" (all thine) which we inscribed in our heart and on our coat of arms twenty years ago on the day of our episcopal ordination. We cannot but invoke Saints Peter and Paul and all the Saints and Blesseds of the universal Church. In this same hour we greet everyone, the old, those in the prime of life, adolescents, children, babes newly born, with that ardent sentiment of fatherhood which is already welling up from our heart. We express the sincere wish that all "may grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ", as the Prince of the Apostles desired (2 Pet 3:18). And to all we impart our first Apostolic Blessing, that it may procure not only for them but for the whole human family an abundance of the gifts of the Father who is in heaven. Amen. © Copyright 1978 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana