



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE "CERTAMEN VATICANUM"

Monday, 27 November 1978

Our revered Brother and dear Sons, who devote yourselves to cultivating and promoting the Latin language, we willingly greet you individually: our revered Brother Cardinal Pericle Felici, who is known to be an expert in the language of the Romans; the Council and members of the Foundation called "Latinitas", which was set up with a certain foresight by our predecessor of happy memory Paul VI. Some of these in our Secretariat of State are engaged in drawing up documents in Latin. We greet also the winners of the 21st competition "Certamen Vaticanum". We highly praise this "Certamen Vaticanum" which in the past was established with the approval and assistance of Pius XII, since it encourages the study of Latin so that one may deepen one's knowledge of it and promote its use. There is no one who is ignorant of the fact that this age is less favourable to the study of Latin, when men today are more interested in science and technology and consider the vernacular to be more expressive. Nevertheless we do not wish to ignore the important documents of our predecessors who time and again emphasised the importance of Latin even in this age, especially in so far as the Church is concerned. For Latin is in a way a universal language cutting across national boundaries and as such the Apostolic See still constantly makes use of it in letters and acts addressed to the whole Catholic family. One must also point out that the sources of the ecclesiastical disciplines are for the most part written in Latin. But what must be said of the outstanding works of the Fathers and other writers of importance who use this tongue? One ought not to be considered a master of learning who does not understand the language of these writers, but who must rely only on translations, if any exist. These rarely bring out the full meaning of the original text. For this reason the Second Vatican Council rightly advised students of sacred studies that "they should acquire a command of Latin which will enable them to understand and use the source material of so many sciences, and the documents of the Church as well" (*Optatam Totius*, 13). We address ourselves especially to young men so that in this age in which as is well known the study of Latin literature and of the humanities is neglected, they should readily accept this Latin heritage, as it were, which the Church considers very important, and work hard to make it fruitful. They should realize that this quotation from Cicero applies in a certain sense to them: "It is not ... so great a distinction to know Latin as it is a disgrace not to know it" (*Brutus*, 37, 140). We exhort all of you here present and those who are helping you, to continue this noble work and to hold high the torch of Latin, which is also a bond between men of different tongues, although it is confirmed within narrower limits than it was in times past. Be assured that successor of Saint Peter in the supreme apostolic ministry wishes every success in your efforts, is helping

and encouraging you. The Apostolic Blessing which we willingly impart to each and everyone of you in the Lord is a sign of this. © Copyright 1978 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

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