



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO A GROUP OF PRIESTS
FROM THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

Thursday, 11 December 1980

Dear brother priests,

1. I am happy to have this occasion to meet with you as you complete your course of continuing theological education at Casa Santa Maria, and as you prepare to return home. We know that, during these moments we spend together, *Jesus Christ is in our midst* because we are gathered in his holy name and in the fraternity of his priesthood.

By God's grace and with the encouragement of your Bishops and religious superiors, you have had the wonderful opportunity for a prolonged reflection on theology and on Sacred Scripture. At the same time I am sure that you have known the other advantages which the Second Vatican Council sees as linked with courses such as yours: a strengthening of the spiritual life and a beneficial exchange of apostolic experiences^[1].

2. And now you are going back to your people, to all those communities in which you exercise your pastoral ministry. You are going back, please God, to proclaim with ever greater understanding and zeal the Good News of salvation, which was revealed by a merciful and loving Father, and which the Church, in fidelity to Christ, communicates from one generation to the next.

The proclamation of the Gospel is your primary task as co-workers with your Bishops, and it reaches its fulfilment in the Eucharistic Sacrifice^[2]. It is the mission to which you were called; it is the reason for which you were ordained.

3. But to be totally effective as priests, *your whole lives must be dedicated to the word of God* and to him who is the Incarnate Word of the Father, Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour, our one High

Priest.

The word of God is the criterion for all our preaching. The power inherent in the word of God is what we offer to our people, and it is this power that unites the faithful and builds them up in holiness and justice. The word of God is a challenge to the People of God - and to the heart of each one of us - but it brings with it strength, immense strength; and when embraced, it produces joy and gladness. The word of God which we are called to proclaim and on which every community of faith is built is the message of the Cross. As we gather day after day, week after week to celebrate this mystery of faith, let us endeavour to present and explain its various aspects, which are so vital for the life of the Church: the healing and forgiveness, the suffering and deliverance, the victory and everlasting mercy held up to us by Christ. Like Saint Paul we may indeed be conscious of presenting ourselves “in weakness and fear and with much trepidation” and without “the persuasive force of ‘wise’ arguments”, but with the word of God we do possess always “the convincing power of the Spirit”. And with Saint Paul let us be always ready to speak truthfully to our people, saying: “Your faith rests not on the wisdom of men but on the power of God”^[3].

4. May the lasting results of your course in Rome be *a renewed commitment to God’s word.*

Continue, dear brothers, to study the word of God, to meditate on it and to live it. Believe in God’s word with all your hearts. Preach it, in union with the whole Church, in all its purity and integrity.

And finally, surrender your own lives totally before its demands and inspirations.

And may Mary, Spouse of the Holy Spirit and Mother of priests, sustain each of you in your ministry of the word and in your priestly consecration to Jesus Christ, the Eternal Word, who “became flesh and made his dwelling among us”^[4].

[1] Cfr. *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 19.

[2] *Ibid*, 4, 13.

[3] *1 Cor.* 2, 4-5.

[4] *Io.* 1, 14.

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