



The Holy See

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

Friday, 6 May 1983

My dear Brothers in the Priesthood of Jesus Christ,

I am happy to welcome all of you who are part of the Institute for Continuing Theological Education of the North American College. The weeks you have spent in Rome have given you the opportunity to renew yourselves in the study of theology and related disciplines, so as to be led with greater vigour to serve God's People in your own dioceses or in the individual apostolates undertaken by your religious communities.

There is one important facet of your priestly service upon which I would like to reflect with you today. You have had the good fortune to witness the solemn opening of the Extraordinary Holy Year of the Redemption. A central theme of this year is reconciliation with God and the ecclesial community through penance and conversion. We seek this reconciliation in various ways, but essential to the process is a renewed awakening among the faithful of an appreciation for the Sacrament of Penance. It is about this matter that I wish to address myself to you today. It is to this sacrament that I wish to call your special attention.

We know that divine mercy is experienced by our people in numerous ways, both as individuals and as members of the community of salvation. But pastoral sensitivity also teaches us that this experience of divine mercy reaches its highest intensity - and finds its most eloquent expression - at that moment when the individual penitent kneels before the minister of the Sacrament of Penance and asks Christ's forgiveness and absolution of his sins.

My brothers, so much of our identity as men of God is associated in the minds of the faithful with our role as sacramental reconcilers. Much of the respect, the deference and the genuine affection

our people show towards us is linked with our power to forgive sins in the name of Christ. We would be less than faithful to the essence of our priestly vocation by not seizing each possible opportunity to offer to our people the healing and reconciling power of Christ's mercy in the Sacrament of Penance.

I ask you today to accept the challenge of proclaiming the mercy and love of God as experienced through the Sacrament of Penance. I invite you to preach it with renewed fervor and insistence; to teach it, by exhorting your people to ever greater conversion, and, above all, to lead the way by practicing it yourselves.

May you be sustained in your efforts by the intercession of Mary, whose motherly prayers always draw us closer to her Son; and may you be confirmed in the grace of Christ the Redeemer, whose love of his priestly servants is the unending source of our life and of our ministry.

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