



The Holy See

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

Thursday, 15 May 1986

*Dear Brothers in Christ,*1. I am pleased to welcome you to the Vatican today. You have come to Rome to participate in the Institute for Continuing Theological Education of the North American College. I am sure that you are grateful for this opportunity of broadening your understanding of the Church's teaching and of deepening your own love for Christ and the Gospel. An experience such as this would undoubtedly prompt you to reflect in a very personal way on the mystery of the Church and on your own vocation to the priesthood. Each of you has already labored for a number of years in the Lord's vineyard. You have known success and failure. You have witnessed both peaceful and turbulent times. You have had the privilege of seeing, at close range, the action of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the people you serve. What a blessed vocation is ours as priests! Truly it is worth all the sacrifices and hardships that are part and parcel of the priesthood today and in every age.2. As you know, this year marks the second centenary of the birth of Saint John Mary Vianney, the Curé of Ars. In my Holy Thursday Letter of this year, I have already shared with you some of my thoughts on this great Patron Saint of parish priests. And, in a few months, I plan to make a pilgrimage to the town where he so faithfully served the Church. As I meet with you today, I would like to encourage you to reflect prayerfully on your own priesthood in the light of his life and ministry. All of his many and varied priestly activities centered on the Eucharist, catechesis and the Sacrament of Penance. These were the primary ways he proclaimed the Gospel of salvation and gave a shepherd's care to the people entrusted to him. We all remember how he would often hear confessions for ten hours or more a day, so popular was he as a confessor. Frequently in his preaching, he spoke of the joy that comes from conversion and the profound peace of being reconciled with God. He helped his people appreciate how the Sacrament of Penance offers to us sinners a very personal encounter with Christ, our merciful Lord. He knew, as we also have known, that, despite the sacrifice of time and effort entailed, administering this sacrament of mercy can be one of the most consoling and uplifting parts of our ministry.3. The Second Vatican Council, when speaking of the priestly life and ministry, also gave special emphasis to the ministry of the word and the celebration of the Eucharist. We find a similar priority in the Curé of Ars. He put great effort into the preparation of his Sunday homilies and generously devoted himself to the task of catechesis. The Liturgy of the Eucharist was clearly the center of his life. Daily, too, he made time for prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. Early in the morning and late in the evening, he would be found there before the Tabernacle, in silent adoration and intimate communion with Christ. Our path to holiness as priests can never be divorced from our pastoral ministry. We were ordained for the service of others, for the sake of Christ and the Gospel. During these months in Rome, you have been responding to Christ's invitation: "Come away by yourselves... and rest a while" . May you now

return to your home dioceses refreshed in body and spirit, eager to continue your ministry to the people entrusted to your care. My prayers accompany you as you go. May Christ, the Good Shepherd, bless you with his peace and joy. ©

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