



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE SPECIAL ASSEMBLY
FOR AMERICA OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS**

Thursday, 11 December 1997

*Your Eminences,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

1. We have come to the end of the Special Assembly for America of the Synod of Bishops. At this time, my soul is opened through the action of grace towards God, who is the source of "every good endowment and every perfect gift" (Jas 1:17). And I am very grateful to you, who have been instruments of God, for speaking of these riches to his Church on the occasion of this Synod Assembly.

My deep gratitude goes out to the Fathers primarily responsible for the Synod, who have borne the burden of the work and are now to be credited for the results. Each day, the Presidents Delegate effectively conducted the Assembly; the General Rapporteur and the two Special Secretaries have helped the discussion of the Synod theme with competence; the General Secretary guided it steadily through the complex Synod process.

The Fraternal Delegates of certain Christian denominations of America, and a good number of men and women who came as *assistants* and *auditors*, made a very significant contribution.

And how could one forget that the Assembly was prepared through prayer, reflection and the consultation of all the local Churches and of other specially chosen organizations and through the various meetings of the Pre-Synodal Council. The harmonious co-operation of numerous ecclesial bodies, as well as various offices and services of the Apostolic See, have certainly contributed to

the happy outcome of these proceedings.

We also recall the many people who support the Synod's work by offering their sufferings and their continual prayer. To each and all goes my personal gratitude.

2. We have come to the end of this interesting ecclesial experience, in which we have truly "walked together" (*synodos*). Today's meeting offers us the opportunity to make an initial evaluation. Tomorrow morning, during the Eucharistic celebration at which I will have the joy of presiding in the Vatican Basilica, we will give thanks to the Lord for the apostolic fruits reaped over these weeks for the benefit of the American continent, from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego, from the Pacific to the Atlantic.

In the future, as is customary after every Synod, I intend to issue an Apostolic Exhortation, which will take into account the *Propositiones* approved by the Assembly and all the richness of the interventions and various reports, in order to implement the pastoral suggestions made during the course of the Synod.

These days that we have spent together have been a true grace from the Lord. We have experienced a special encounter with the living Jesus Christ, and we have walked together on the path of conversion, communion and solidarity. We have felt united in the name of Jesus (cf. Mt 18:19-20) through the action of the Holy Spirit, who illumines the present and the future of the American continent with the joy of hope that never disappoints (cf. Rom 5:5). Through the numerous interventions, which have recalled the greatness and beauty of the Christian vocation, we have all been encouraged to follow Christ the Shepherd, Priest and Prophet, each one according to his or her own vocation.

The common call to follow Christ has made us understand the disturbing situations in which many of our brothers and sisters live. Many of them, in fact, find themselves in conditions contrary to the dignity of God's children: extreme poverty, lack of minimal care for illness; widespread illiteracy; exploitation; violence; and drug dependency. What can be said about the psychological pressure inflicted on people in industrialized societies, which impedes, in various ways, their access to the living source of the Gospel: a climate of mistrust towards the Church, anti-religious campaigns in the communication media; the harmful influence of permissiveness, fascination with easy, sometimes ill-gotten wealth. Denunciation of these deplorable situations has appeared in many of the Synod Fathers' interventions.

3. However, together with these courageous denunciations, you did not fail to stress the reasons for hope and comfort. An increasing number of young people have opted for the priestly and religious life, offering their dynamism and creativity for the task of the new evangelization. Many worthy priests and consecrated people, faithful to the charism of their own institutes, are supporting you in your apostolate, venerable Brothers. And how could we fail to remember the

thousands of lay faithful who, in response to your call, have become your close co-workers in apostolic activity? They co-operate in a wide variety of ways in the work of evangelization, especially in small communities of the faithful, who, in the heart of the major cities, in the countryside, and in the far away towns, meet together to pray and listen to the Word of God.

There are also the lay faithful — men and women — who, following their specific lay vocation, are skillfully involved in the various political, economic and social areas of life, so that they can be imbued with Gospel ferment, in order to build a world of greater justice, fraternity and solidarity. Their courageous irreplaceable action is an essential component of evangelization, making the explicit proclamation of Jesus Christ more credible in a world increasingly in need of concrete actions rather than words.

During this Synod, we have reflected together on the paths of the new evangelization, in the search for answers of life, reconciliation and peace to be offered to the entire American continent.

The rich experience of fraternity, so vivid in these weeks, must continue as a permanent witness of unity for a continent called in its various sectors to integration and solidarity. This is a pastoral priority in which all are invited to offer their collaboration.

At various times in this hall, it has been recalled how important it is to give not only from one's surplus, but from one's own necessity, as in the example of the widow mentioned in the Gospel (cf. Mk 12:42-44). If it is true that on the American continent, as elsewhere in the world, the challenges are many and complex, and the tasks seem to exceed human energies, I repeat to each and every one of you here today: "Fear not! Above all, base your whole life on the hope which never deceives" (cf. Rom 5:5).

4. Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate, dear brothers and sisters! To the extent that my daily schedule permitted, I have had the pleasure of following the work of the Synod. I have been struck by a constant call which emerged from the interventions and the exchanges: I refer to the *invitation to solidarity*. Yes, solidarity must be prophetically encouraged and testified to in practice. Solidarity, by joining the efforts of each individual and all peoples, will help to overcome the harmful effects of certain situations forcefully brought to our attention during the Synod: a *globalization* which, despite possible benefits, has also produced forms of social injustice; the nightmare of some countries *foreign debt*, for which it is urgent to find adequate and equitable solutions; the scourge of *unemployment* due, at least in part, to imbalances existing between countries; the difficult challenges caused by *immigration and human mobility*, together with the sufferings which give rise to them.

The synodal process has led us to experience how true are the words of the Psalm: "Ecce quam bonum et quam iucundum habitare fratres in unum" (Ps 133:1). *Solidarity* is born of fraternal love, which is the more effective the more it is rooted in divine charity.

May God grant, as the best fruit of the Synod, an increase of understanding and love between the peoples of America. Here I would recall that, as it has been observed, the opposite of love is not necessarily hatred; it can also be indifference, disinterest, or lack of concern. It is along the path of love that we wish to enter the new millennium.

Dear friends, in a few days you will return to your particular Churches in order to join your brothers and sisters in faith in carrying on the work of this Synod. Bring them the Pope's greetings and his embrace.

I continue to be near to you in prayer. I entrust you to God's Providence and I invoke upon you the light and strength of the *Holy Spirit*. Together we have begun the year specially dedicated to him, another significant step leading to the celebration of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. The Spirit brings about our *conversion* and puts us in *communion* with our brothers and sisters. It is he who impels us to live the greatest of gifts: the Christian love which today is expressed in *solidarity*.

May Our Lady of Guadalupe, the patroness of all America and the Star of the first and of the new evangelization, obtain for us the grace of experiencing and seeing increase the abundant fruits of the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops.

To all of you I impart my Blessing!

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