



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE NEOCATECHUMENAL WAY**

Friday, 24 January 1997

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. Welcome to the Pope's home! I greet you with affection, dear itinerant lay people and priests, together with your leaders who promote the Neocatechumenal Way. Your visit today is a great comfort to me.

I know that you have come directly from your meeting on Mount Sinai and the shores of the Red Sea. For various reasons this has been an historic moment for you. For your spiritual retreat, you chose a place highly significant in the history of salvation, one very appropriate for listening to and meditating on the word of God, in order better to understand the Lord's plan for you.

This is how you wished to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the Neocatechumenal Way. How far you have come with the Lord's help! In recent years the Way's growth and spread in the Church has been truly impressive. Begun in the slums of Madrid, 30 years later it has become, like the Gospel mustard seed, a great tree which has now spread to more than 100 countries of the world, with a significant presence also among Catholics of the Eastern-rite Churches.

2. Like every anniversary, seen in the light of faith, yours too becomes an opportunity for praise and thanksgiving for the abundant gifts that in these years the Lord has granted you and, through you, to the whole Church. For many people the Neocatechumenal experience has been a journey of conversion and maturing in the faith through *the rediscovery of Baptism* as a true source of life, and of the Eucharist as the culminating moment in Christian life; through *the rediscovery of the word of God* which, shared in fraternal communion, becomes a light and guide for life; through *the rediscovery of the Church* as an authentic missionary community.

How many young people have actually discovered their own priestly or religious vocation thanks to the Way! Your visit today also offers me a happy opportunity to join in your hymn of praise and thanksgiving for the “great things” (*magnalia*) which God is doing in the experience of the Way.

3. Its history belongs to that blossoming of movements and ecclesial groups which is one of the most beautiful fruits of the spiritual renewal begun by the Second Vatican Council. This flourishing was and still is a great gift of the Holy Spirit and a radiant sign of hope on the threshold of the third millennium. Both pastors and lay faithful must be able to welcome this gift with gratitude, but also with a sense of responsibility, keeping in mind that “in the Church, both the institutional and the charismatic aspects, the hierarchy and the associations and movements of the faithful, are co-essential and, although in different ways, contribute to her life, renewal and sanctification” (To participants in the International Colloquium of Ecclesial Movements, *Insegnamenti*, Vol XI/1, 1987, 478).

In today’s deeply secularized world, *the new evangelization represents a fundamental challenge*. The ecclesial movements, which are marked precisely by their missionary zeal, are called to a special commitment in a spirit of communion and collaboration. In the Encyclical *Redemptoris missio* I wrote in this regard: “When these movements humbly seek to become part of the life of local Churches and are welcomed by Bishops and priests within diocesan and parish structures, they represent a true gift of God both for the new evangelization and for missionary activity properly so-called. I therefore recommend that they be spread, and that they be used to give fresh energy, especially among young people, to the Christian life” (n. 72).

For this reason, for the year 1998, which within the framework of preparation for the Great Jubilee is dedicated to the Holy Spirit, I am hoping for a *common witness of all the ecclesial movements*, under the guidance of the Pontifical Council for the Laity. It will be a moment of communion and renewed commitment in the service of the Church’s mission. I am certain that you will not fail to keep this significant appointment.

4. The Neocatechumenal Way is 30 years old: the age, I would say, of a certain maturity. Your meeting at Sinai has, in a certain sense, opened a *new stage* before you. Therefore you have appropriately sought not only to look back at the past in a spirit of faith, but also to look ahead to the future, asking yourselves what God’s plan for the Neocatechumenal Way is at this historic moment. The Lord has put a precious treasure in your hands. How to live it to the full? How to develop it? How to share it with others? How to defend it from various present and future dangers? These are some of the questions you have asked yourselves, as leaders of the Way or as its first itinerants.

To answer these questions, in an atmosphere of prayer and deep reflection, at Sinai you began the process of drafting *Statutes for the Way*. This is a very important step that will lead to its formal juridical recognition by the Church, and it gives you a further guarantee of the authenticity of your

charism. As we know, “those who have charge over the Church should judge the genuineness and proper use of these gifts [the charisms], through their office not indeed to extinguish the Spirit, but to test all things and hold fast to what is good” (*Lumen gentium*, n. 12). I encourage you to continue the work you have begun under the guidance of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, and especially, of its Secretary, Bishop Stanislaw Rylko, present here with you. My special prayers go with you on this path.

Before concluding, I would like to give a cross to several sisters as a sign of their fidelity to the Church and their total dedication to the evangelizing mission. May the Lord Jesus be your comfort and support at difficult moments. May the Blessed Virgin, Mother of the Church, be your model and guide in every circumstance.

With these wishes, I impart my affectionate Blessing to you here present and to all who are involved in the Neocatechumenal Way.

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