



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
POPE JOHN PAUL II
AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE ANNUAL
LENTEN RETREAT IN THE VATICAN**

Saturday, 7 March 1998

1. At the end of this week's intense spiritual journey, I would like to thank Cardinal Ján Chryzostom Korec. In the reflections given during these exercises which are now ending, he has sought to guide us on the soul's traditional pilgrimage through Lent, bringing us to the abundant sources of God's Word and the liturgy. In the silence of the desert, we more sharply perceive the beneficial presence of God, who prepares great things for those who are ready to believe in him and live in his light.

The theme of the spiritual exercises this year is directly related to the journey of preparation for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 - "*Christus heri, hodie et in saecula*" - since the whole Church is living with renewed hope and in anxious expectation of the new millennium. The mystery of Christ pervades her, enlivens her and spurs her on the arduous path of penance, so that, purified and cleansed, she can go out with a joyful heart to meet the Bridegroom who comes.

2. I warmly thank the preacher, who has expressed our wish to prepare with faith and love for Easter, towards which we are journeying. Our spiritual director's reflections led to a vision of optimism and hope. Through the beneficial effort of our spiritual pilgrimage, he has helped us to overcome the obtuseness of those who do not know how to fathom the mystery which enfolds us, and he has led us to contemplate the mysteries of the faith on which our life is based. We extend to him our cordial thanks, which are accompanied by the assurance of our prayer for his person and for his pastoral ministry.

The Holy Father then said in Slovak:

I would also like to express this gratitude, venerable Brother, in your language. Like everyone here, I am grateful for your spiritual reflections, and especially for the witness of courageous fidelity to Christ which you gave in the difficult years when you became a point of reference for priests and lay people in your country. I am also pleased that the spiritual

exercises have been preached for the first time to the Roman Curia by a Slovak Cardinal.

The Pope continued in Italian:

I would also like to address a word of grateful appreciation to those who have wished to share this spiritual journey and to those who made all the arrangements so that it would be conducted smoothly and fruitfully.

3. Now, just as Moses descended the mountain where he had encountered the fascinating and tremendous beauty of God, we also return to the valley, to our daily work, to proclaim the marvels we have contemplated. The preacher has reminded us that we can count on the Holy Spirit's support in this. It is due to the silent but all-powerful action of the Third Person of the Trinity that the Church can continue to carry out her ministry with steadfast trust, proclaiming to the generations which succeed one another on the face of the earth Christ who is always the same "*yesterday, today and for ever*".

We are ending our spiritual exercises on this First Saturday of the month, dedicated particularly to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. With intense affection we call on Mary, who was the first to accept Christ with total docility to the Spirit's action. May she guide and support us on the Lenten journey we are undertaking, so that we may be ever faithful to the Lord of life and history.

My Blessing to all.

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