



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE PONTIFICAL SWISS GUARD

Wednesday, 5 May 1999

Dear Commandant,

Dear Guards,

*Dear Relatives and Friends of the Swiss Guards,*1. From the very beginning of the Pontifical Swiss Guard an unbroken tradition brings you together on this day which recalls your special commitment to the welfare and life of the Successor of Peter. Therefore it is a great joy for me to receive you this year as well in the Apostolic Palace, with your parents, relatives and friends. I extend a special welcome to the new recruits who will be admitted to your corps through the oath by which they commit themselves to devoting a few years of their life to a very honourable and responsible task in the heart of the universal Church.2. Dear recruits, you have chosen to dedicate yourselves to a deeply ecclesial service and through it you would like to bear witness to the world. I sincerely thank you for this. You do not offer your service as individuals, but as a community. On a day of celebration like today, it is a blessing to be surrounded and supported by so many people. But to live this community every day is also a challenge. If young men — like the members of the Swiss Guard — are determined to walk a certain stretch of the road together, they should look on their own hopes and concerns, their expectations and their needs as reflected in the communities of the early Church. Vital relationships between individuals, even between Jesus' disciples, were the same in biblical times as they are now. Sacred Scripture does not hide the fact that some people followed St Paul at the beginning, but later left him to go their own way. Perfect harmony did not always prevail because characters, temperaments and interests were so different. However, the disciples who served Jesus exerted a powerful and inviting attraction. Paul, who must have experienced as no one else that God can write straight on the crooked lines of life, always explained in his writings how God loved his people and never abandoned them in the ebb and flow of their history, in the tension between fidelity and denial. God has given us the definitive fulfilment of this abiding commitment to mankind through his Son, whom he sent into the world “as a Saviour, according to his promise” (cf. *Acts* 13:23).3. Dear Guards, I would like to encourage you to bear witness to the love of God in Jesus Christ with youthful joy and vigour. This witness is particularly expressed in two ways: in joining the Pontifical Swiss Guard, you show your intention to dedicate your service in a special way to the Holy Father, who has been entrusted with the pastoral care of the whole flock (cf. *Jn* 21:16). In addition, through your commitment to the various tasks assigned to your corps, you testify to others who your Lord is and what motivates your work.4. With this, I would also like to express a thought that is particularly dear to me. Your efforts regarding training and service regulations, technical skill and professional competence are important. It is also important that you use your stay in Rome as a unique

chance to sharpen your image as Christians. I am thinking especially of your spiritual life: you must ask yourselves what God's plan is for each of you. At the same time, I call your attention to how important brotherly relations are between those who call themselves Christian, both on and off duty. Frank, fraternal conversation can sometimes be difficult and demanding, but if it takes place in an honest and trustful way, it allows those who take part to develop mature personalities.⁵ I take this occasion, dear young guards, to wish you a happy time in the Eternal City. I invite the guards who have served a long time in the corps as senior officers to foster trusting relations which can support and encourage all the members of the Swiss Guard, even at difficult moments. I also hope that during your time of service in Rome you will stay in close contact with your parents, your relatives and all the friends you have in your country. Everyone will then rejoice with you over the extraordinary opportunity you have been given to have new experiences that will bear fruit. As I invoke upon you the intercession of the Virgin Mary and of your holy patrons, Nicholas of Flüe, Martin and Sebastian, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing to you and to everyone who has come to be with you as you take your oath.