



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT TO ANCONA, ITALY

***ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE CLERGY, RELIGIOUS AND LAY REPRESENTATIVES
OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF ANCONA-OSIMO***

*St Cyriacus Cathedral
Sunday, 30 May 1999*

Dear Brothers and Sisters!

1. I greet you with great affection in this very beautiful Cathedral of St Cyriacus, the image and centre of your Archdiocese. The celebration of its millennium calls to mind the mysterious and gracious presence of God in the history of this land and all the good achieved by those who, by listening attentively and generously to the Gospel, supported the work of grace. I am thinking of the priests and deacons ordained in this church, the consecrated virgins and the many committed Christians who sought the strength here to become well-hewn stones in the spiritual edifice of the Church and providential instruments of salvation history.

This meeting is a continuation of this morning's Eucharistic celebration. There, gathered around the Successor of Peter and the Archbishop, your archdiocesan community showed itself in all its fullness. Here it is presenting its support structures: the priests, deacons, men and women religious, pastoral workers and representatives of the lay ecclesial associations. The lead at this morning's meeting was taken by the "leavened dough", ready to become good bread; now centre stage is taken by all those who, by administering the sacraments and serving the Word, imbue the history of this people with the dynamic new life of the Gospel. Thank you for your presence; thank you for all the good you do by responding with constant devotion and faithful love to the call of the Lord, who sends you out to sow and water the Church, his mystical field.

I extend a cordial greeting to your beloved Pastor, Archbishop Franco Festorazzi, who experiences more than anyone else the labour and joy of proclaiming the Gospel in this ancient and noble Archdiocese of Ancona-Osimo. I am particularly grateful to him for his cordial words on behalf of you all.

2. As I approached your cathedral, whose commanding position and imposing architecture make it a powerful sign of God's presence among you, I thought of the words of the Psalmist who, at the sight of the temple in Jerusalem, exclaimed: "I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord!'" (Ps 122:1). The view of "beautiful St Cyriacus", as one of your folksongs describes it, leads us to an admiring contemplation of God the Creator, the supreme Artist, who created the universe in all its beauty and harmony (cf. Gn 1:31).

He entrusts to man, made in his own image and likeness, the task of continuing his work and calls artists in particular to be prophets of beauty, thus associating them with the mystery of creation. The fruitful relationship between art, the Gospel and the Church has made beauty an extraordinary way to encounter God, as is shown by the important exhibition "Books of Stone", opened on the occasion of the millennium celebrations.

These celebrations are a hymn of praise to the Lord who, by allowing the artists who built and decorated this temple to have "a momentary glimpse of the abyss of light" whose original wellspring is in him, has opened to them "a path to the inmost reality of man and of the world" and a possible way to salvation (cf. *Letter to Artists*, n. 6).

3. For 1,000 years, your cathedral has told a story of faith. A church of stone that has defied the passing of time, it is also the Mother Church which welcomes the entire community made of "living stones ... built into a spiritual house" (1 Pt 2:5) and "built upon the foundation of the Apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone" (Eph 2:20).

The biblical images which use the visible reality of the temple to refer to the Church's mystery, constitute an obligation for you, the archdiocesan community gathered in it, to fulfil what the stone edifice represents. The millenary celebrations thus call you to be more and more a living Church which resists the winds, storms and dangerous infiltrations of the spirit of the world and each day shows God's love for mankind, revealed in Jesus Christ. A house of God set upon a mountain, your cathedral commits you to being a model community to which everyone can look as a reference-point for drawing inspiration in their approach to interpersonal relations in civil society.

Dear brothers and sisters, what an extraordinary mission the Father is entrusting to you! In the footsteps of the martyrs and saints who have made your history great, you are called to be involved in the spiritual construction of your Church with the love and fervour of the artists who have made this cathedral resplendent. Your task is greater than theirs: to make the face of God's Church in Ancona-Osimo even more splendid on the threshold of a new Christian millennium.

4. At this moment of deep faith and hope, I would like to show you some ways to achieve this exalting task, which is not free of difficulty, but is sustained by the fidelity of the One who continuously says to his Apostles: "Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Mt 28:20).

First of all, I urge you *to be ever more deeply united with your Bishop*. This communion of thoughts, sentiments and projects is the Lord's greatest gift to his Church, the substance of the Christian community's life and the goal of their whole mission. It requires of the Christian a continuous response of love, acceptance, generosity and joy, which constitute the true identity of the Lord's disciple (cf. Jn 13:35).

In the local Church, communion has its visible source and foundation (*Lumen gentium*, n. 23) in the Bishop, the "vicar and legate of Christ" (ibid., n. 27), to whom every member of the faithful is bound to obey as he does the Lord. St Ignatius of Antioch recalls with enlightening words the profound reasons for this characteristic feature of Christ's true Church: "You must be one with the Bishop's mind, as you already are. In fact, your presbyteral college, worthy of its name and worthy of God, is united to the Bishop like the strings to the zither; and a hymn to Jesus Christ rises from your unity, from your concordant love. But you lay people must also form a single choir, all taking your key from God, united in the closest harmony, to sing praises with one voice to the Father through Jesus Christ: he will listen to you and recognize by your deeds that you are the hymn of his Son" (*Epistle to the Ephesians*, 3-6).

My heartfelt wish is that your commitment to communion will instil in the community of Ancona an ever new harmony which can glorify the Lord and draw souls to Christ.

5. I also invite you *to respond with joy to the particular call God has given each of you*. With the variety of your ministries and charisms, you are signs of the unforeseeable love of God "who, according to ... the needs of the ministries, gives his different gifts for the welfare of the Church" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 7). The Lord calls each of you, in the diversity of members and functions, to build up Christ's body.

"Lead a life worthy of the calling you have received" (Eph 4:1, 11) and of the particular call addressed to you by the Lord Jesus. The Apostle Paul's exhortation obliges everyone to respond generously, creatively and responsibly to the vocation he has received, to be an effective instrument of communion and to offer a joyful witness of faith to non-believers, with ever new zeal in proclaiming the Gospel to those near and far. To this end, serious formation is necessary to evangelize contemporary society and culture, which are sometimes aloof or indifferent to the Gospel proclamation.

You have just celebrated the 90th anniversary of the Regional Seminary of the Marches, where countless pastors of your Church were prepared for the priesthood. In thanking the Lord for the persevering and intelligent work done by past and present educators, I urge you to make every effort to see that this worthy institution does not lack your constant spiritual and material support. At the same time I urge the seminarians to respond generously to the Lord's call and to the expectations of God's People by preparing themselves for the great mission that awaits them with sound spiritual, theological, cultural and human formation.

6. Another way to build and increase the unity of the archdiocesan community is interparochial collaboration. The parish is always like "a cell" of the Diocese and is its basic structure, which must be supported in every way, as suggested by the pastoral plans drawn up in recent years. It "offers an outstanding example of community apostolate, for it gathers into a unity all the human diversities that are found there and inserts them into the universality of the Church" (*Apostolicam actuositatem*, n. 10); it should be conceived as a very effective instrument to achieve the unity of the local Church. Generous and organized collaboration between parishes, in addition to fostering ecclesial communion, is a strong growth factor for the life of the parish community itself. Indeed, by being open to the problems of a wider territory, the parish discovers the richness of the Lord's gifts, fosters the missionary dimension and teaches the faithful a sense of the local and universal Church.

May it be your concern, dear pastoral workers, to make every effort to carry out all possible forms of parish and interparish collaboration, in order better to share and bear witness to the Gospel.

7. Dear priests, religious, and committed lay people, at the end of my visit to your community I hope that the celebration of the cathedral's millennium will be a moment of special grace for your Archdiocese and for each of you, on the eve of the Great Jubilee. May it prepare you to lead your Archdiocese into a new millennium of faith and hope.

May Mary, Mother of the Church and Queen of All Saints, increase your love for your Church and make you a Gospel leaven which causes the dough to rise.

With these hopes, as I invoke Sts Cyriacus and Leopardus, patrons of your Archdiocese, I warmly impart a special Apostolic Blessing to your Pastor, to each of you and to the beloved Church in Ancona-Osimo.

At the end of the meeting, the Holy Father said to the many faithful waiting outside the cathedral:

Almost 20 years ago I visited Ancona from below. Today I can see the sea from Ancona and I find myself above it. Thank you for this meeting. The Lord bless you! To return here I had to wait almost 20 years. Praised be Jesus Christ!