



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE ASSOCIATION OF STS PETER AND PAUL

Saturday, 16 June 2001

Dear Members of the Association of Sts Peter and Paul,

1. I am delighted to meet with you on the 30th anniversary of your sodality. I greet your families and the new members received by you today. I greet your President, Mr Gianluigi Marrone, and thank him for his words on your behalf and your spiritual director, Mons. Franco Follo. I offer my heartfelt gratitude to each of you for your generous and professional service to the Holy See, and especially to the Successor of Peter.

I am likewise pleased that our meeting takes place just before the solemnity of the Holy Apostles, on whose witness and martyrdom Divine Providence built the Church of Rome. St Augustine expresses this in the *Liturgy of the Hours* on the day dedicated to the Apostles Peter and Paul: "One day is assigned for the celebration of the martyrdom of two apostles. But those two were one. Although their martyrdom occurred on different days, they were one. Peter went first, Paul followed. We celebrated the feast day which is made sacred for us by the blood of these apostles. Let us love their faith, their life, their trials, their passion, their profession and their teaching" (*Sermon 295: PL 38, 1352*).

2. A mysterious unity was given to the Church on Pentecost, a unity that does not come from man and transcends every reason for human division. The gift of the Holy Spirit, that makes the faithful of Christ "of one heart and one soul" (cf. Acts 1,14; 2,46), remains through history, accompanying the Church in her mission of announcing the Gospel to all peoples to the end of time. This gift is "in earthen vessels" (cf. II Cor 4,7) and is continually threatened by our human fragility. Peter was called, in a singular way, to guard the precious gift of ecclesial unity. After the triple confession of his love, the Lord gave him the task of feeding the sheep (cf. Jn 21,15-17). The assistance that Christ promised to Peter also accompanies his successors, who are entrusted with the same task

for the Church: "I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren" (Lk 22,32).

3. So Peter becomes the "rock" on which Christ can build his Church in history, by a gift from on high: the gift of faith, solemnly confessed at Caesarea Philippi: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Mt 16,16). But it is also in virtue of his response of singular love that he is chosen to be the foundation of the Church: "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?... Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you" (cf. Jn 21,15-19). On the rock of this faith and this love, the Lord holds together his mystical Body and assures the permanent unity and mission in the varied events of history.

Dear friends, the service entrusted to you is closely linked with the mission of Peter's Successor. Today I want to repeat my sincere appreciation for the diligent work that you carry out, both during the sacred Liturgies and in contact with pilgrims in the Patriarchal Basilica of St Peter. May the Lord reward you! May your activity, nourished by constant prayer, bring you to fulfil your Christian vocation always more.

4. If your spirit is illumined by faith, you can understand yourselves better and help the pilgrims and all whom you meet, to enter more deeply into the mystery of Christ and his Church. How many people come to Rome "to see Peter" and to be confirmed in their faith! The recent Jubilee Year offered a moving witness to this affection for the Apostolic See, called to guard the truth and unity of the Church and to confirm the baptized in their faith in the Redeemer.

In repeating my grateful appreciation for your collaboration, I encourage you to make your daily activity the occasion to show a sincere love for Christ, a generous dedication to the Church, a special bond with the Successor of Peter. Grow in faith to be more motivated in your service. May your motto be a program of life: "*Fide constamus avita*" (we stand firm in our ancestral faith).

With these sentiments, while assuring you of my constant remembrance in prayer, I invoke Mary's protection, whom you venerate with the title *Virgo Fidelis*, and impart to you and to your loved ones a special Apostolic Blessing.