



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO A GROUP OF BISHOPS,
FRIENDS OF THE FOCOLARE MOVEMENT**

Thursday, 13 February 2003

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,

1. I am pleased to offer my cordial welcome to this meeting, which is held in the context of the spiritual conference of the Bishops who are friends of the Focolare Movement. The theme is "*Spirituality of communion: ecclesial unity and universal brotherhood*". With affection I greet you all. I greet especially Cardinal Miloslav Vlk, Archbishop of Prague, and I thank him for his courteous words on behalf of those present; he has given me a general idea of your exercises. I cordially greet Chiara Lubich, Foundress of the Movement, who spoke at your conference.

In these days of reflection, exchange of witnessing and pastoral experiences, you have wished to deepen the "the spirituality of communion", responding to my invitation, expressed in the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio ineunte*, "to promote a spirituality of communion" and "to make the Church the home and the school of communion" (cf. n. 43).

Your personal reflections and mutual dialogue have helped to shed greater light on the permanent need for an authentic spirituality of communion that may more decisively invigorate the life and activities of the Christian people.

2. The "spirituality of communion" is articulated into different elements that are rooted in the Gospel and enriched by the contribution made to the entire Christian community by the Focolare Movement, committed to witnessing to the "spirituality of unity". Among other things, I would like here to mention unity as the "testament" that Jesus left to his disciples (cf. Jn 17), the mystery of the crucified and abandoned Christ as the "way" to reach it, the celebration of the Eucharist as the bond of communion, the unifying and lifegiving action of the Holy Spirit in the Mystical Body of

Christ and in its members, the presence of the Virgin Mary, Mother of unity, who leads us all to Christ.

Nor should we forget the dynamic character of the "spirituality of communion" that derives from the existing bond between love of God and love of neighbour. In this perspective, it is indispensable to learn the art of "beingsanctified together" in a personal and communal way. A more organic communion "between the institutional and the charismatic dimensions" of the Church is likewise necessary. Indeed, these are both co-essential dimensions, which "help to make the Mystery of Christ and his saving work present in the world" (*Message to the World Congress of Ecclesial Movements and New Communities*, n. 5; *ORE*, 10 June 1998, p. 2).

3. The commitment to a "spirituality of communion" gives a renewed impetus to ecumenism, since it is an incentive to identify forms and ways that will better favour the concrete realization of the longing for the unity of Christians that Jesus left to us at the Last Supper as gift and mission.

A spirituality of communion also opens up great possibilities for interreligious dialogue, which, however, as I recalled in my Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio ineunte*, cannot be founded on religious indifferentism. Nor should we fear "that it will be considered an offence to the identity of others what is rather the joyful proclamation of a gift meant for all, and to be offered to all with the greatest respect for the freedom of each one: the gift of the revelation of the God who is Love" (n. 56).

4. Venerable and dear Brothers, the effort to build a "spirituality of communion" requires that we overcome every difficulty, misunderstanding and also failure. It is necessary to continue without pausing on the path undertaken, confident of the support of divine grace to give life to a genuine "ecclesial unity" and a solid "universal brotherhood".

For this I ask Our Lady of the Holy Rosary for her motherly protection, and, as I assure you of my affection, combined with my constant remembrance in prayer, I cordially impart to each one of you present here, a special Apostolic Blessing, which I gladly extend to the communities entrusted to your pastoral care and to all your loved ones.