



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS
ORGANIZED BY THE PONTIFICAL LATERAN UNIVERSITY
ON THE THEME:**

***"John Paul II: a Pontificate of 25 years.
The Church at the service of humanity"***

Friday, 9 May 2003

*Your Eminences,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

1. I am pleased to meet you here on this joyful occasion which has gathered together lecturers and students of the "Pope's University". I would like to greet the Cardinals and Bishops present, as well as the participants in the Convention organized on this occasion, the teachers and students of the various faculties.

I also thank Bishop Rino Fisichella, Rector Magnificent, for the sentiments he has expressed and for the important gift of the two works with which the university intends to commemorate this moment.

2. I am thinking back to the three visits that God has granted me to make to your athenaeum in the course of these years. Every meeting of this kind sparks memories of my own experience in academic teaching at Kraków and Lublin. They were years enriched by study, contacts and research, fired by the desire to identify and explore new paths for an evangelization alert to the challenges of the modern age. The knowledge I acquired at that time was useful to me in my pastoral ministry, first in Kraków and later as Successor of Peter, in the service I continue to carry

out for the entire people of God.

In every phase and stage of university life and pastoral ministry, one of the essential reference points for me was attention to the person, placed at the centre of all philosophical or theological research.

3. I therefore appreciate that to commemorate the 25th anniversary of my Pontificate, you have chosen to organize this convention on a particularly timely theme: "*The Church at the service of humanity*", requesting the highly qualified and representative participation of members of the Roman Curia and the world of culture.

I wrote in my first Encyclical, *Redemptor Hominis*: "The Church cannot abandon man, for his 'destiny', that is to say his election, calling, birth and death, salvation or perdition, is so closely and unbreakably linked with Christ... this man is the primary route that the Church must travel in fulfilling her mission: he is the primary and fundamental way for the Church, the way traced out by Christ himself, the way that leads invariably through the mystery of the Incarnation and the Redemption" (n. 14).

4. The Gospel message is intended for men and women of every race and culture, to serve as a beacon of light and salvation in the various situations in which they exist. This perennial service to the "truth" about man stirs up enthusiasm in all who desire to know more and more about themselves and perceive with increasing awareness the longing to encounter Christ, the total fulfilment of the human being. This also represents a vast field of action for you who, with missionary verve, intend to contribute to identifying new paths for the evangelization of culture. Christ is the truth that sets free all who seek him with sincerity and perseverance. He is the truth that the Church proclaims tirelessly in different ways, spreading the one Gospel of salvation to the ends of the earth and inculturating it in the various regions of the world.

St Irenaeus recalled with wisdom: "As the sun, a creature of God, is unique in the whole universe, so the preaching of the truth shines forth everywhere and illumines all who desire knowledge of the truth.... A great orator or a poor speaker, all teach the same truth. No one can diminish the value of Tradition. The faith is one and the same. Thus, the eloquent speaker cannot enrich it, nor the stammerer impoverish it" (*Adversus Haereses*, 1, 10, 3).

5. Your university, like other centres for ecclesiastical or religious studies, is a special training ground where different generations of "apostles" can gain a personal experience of Christ, deepen their knowledge of him and prepare themselves to be witnesses of his love in pastoral ministry. May your technological, philosophical and scientific research help the people of our time perceive more clearly the longing for God, hidden in the depths of every heart!

I ask God to make your activities fruitful by his grace. May Mary, *Sedes Sapientiae* (Seat of

Wisdom) help you with her motherly protection. For my part, I assure you of my constant remembrance in prayer, as I impart to each and every one of you a special Apostolic Blessing.