



The Holy See

25th ANNIVERSARY OF THE PONTIFICATE OF JOHN PAUL II

SIGNING AND PROMULGATION OF THE POST-SYNODAL APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION "PASTORES GREGIS"

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II *Thursday, 16 October 2003 Your Eminences,*

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate, 1. With deep joy I sign and present to the whole Church, and ideally to each one of her Bishops, the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Gregis*. I compiled it from the various contributions offered by the Fathers of the Tenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, whose theme was: "*The Bishop, Servant of the Gospel of Jesus Christ for the Hope of the World*". I address my cordial and fraternal greeting to the Cardinals, with a special grateful thought for Cardinal Jan Pieter Schotte, General Secretary of the Synod of Bishops. I then greet the Patriarchs, the Presidents of the Episcopal Conferences and the Archbishops and Bishops present. Through you, Venerable Brothers, may my affection reach out to the entire Episcopal College, which reflects the universality and unity of the pilgrim People of God in the world (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 22). I extend my greeting to all the particular Churches and their members: priests, deacons, consecrated persons and lay faithful. I assure each one of my spiritual closeness. 2. The Synod Fathers recalled *the great importance of episcopal service* for the life of the People of God. They reflected at length on the collegial nature of the Episcopate; they stressed that the duties of teaching, sanctifying and governing must be exercised in hierarchical communion and in fraternal unity with the Head and with the other members of the Episcopal College. The *Gospel image of the Good Shepherd* was the icon to which the Synod's work constantly referred. The Synodal Assembly has clearly defined what should be the spirit in which the Bishop is called to carry out his service in the Church: knowledge of his flock, love for everyone and attention to each person, compassion and striving to find the stray sheep. These are some of the features that characterize the Bishop's ministry. He is called to be a father, teacher, friend and brother to every person after the example of Christ. By faithfully following this path, he will be able to achieve holiness, a holiness that must not develop *apart* from his ministry but *through* the ministry itself. 3. As a *herald of the divine Word, teacher and doctor of the faith*, the Bishop has the task of teaching the Christian faith with apostolic honesty, representing it in an authentic way. As "*the steward of the grace of the supreme priesthood*" (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 26), he will make sure that liturgical celebrations are an *epiphany of the mystery*. In other words, may they be an expression of the genuine nature of the Church, which actively worships God, through Christ, in the Holy Spirit. As a *guide of the Christian people* with pastoral and ministerial power, the Bishop must be concerned to encourage the participation of all the faithful in the building up of the Church. He will carry out his specific task with that personal responsibility which derives from his mission at the service of the entire community. Attentive to the needs of the

Church and of the world, he will face the challenges of the present time. He will be a *prophet of justice and peace*, defender of the rights of the lowly and the marginalized. He will proclaim to all the Gospel of life, truth and love. He will look with special love upon the multitudes of the poor who populate the earth. Mindful of Christ's desire "*ut omnes unum sint*" (that all may be one) (Jn 17: 21), in the first place he will support the *ecumenical process*, so that the Church may shine among the peoples to rally them to unity and concord. In addition, in our multiethnic society at the beginning of this third millennium, he will champion *interreligious dialogue*.⁴ Your Eminences, venerable Patriarchs and Brothers in the Episcopate, in presenting to you the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Gregis*, I well know the multiple tasks that the Lord has entrusted to us. The office to which we are called is a difficult and serious one. Where will we find the strength to carry it out in accordance with Christ's wishes? Undoubtedly, in him alone. Today, being Pastors of his flock is particularly fatiguing and demanding; nevertheless, we must have faith "*contra spem in spem*" (Rom 4: 18). Christ walks with us and sustains us with his grace.

May Mary Most Holy, who together with the Apostles awaited the coming of the Holy Spirit in persevering prayer, revive hope in us. May she intercede with God so that the radiant face of Christ will always shine out in the Church. Dear Brothers in the Episcopate, the Pope shares in the concerns, anxieties, sufferings, hopes and joys of your ministry. He is spiritually close to each one of you, as he imparts his Blessing to you all.