



The Holy See

25th ANNIVERSARY OF THE PONTIFICATE

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE CARDINALS, PATRIARCHS, ARCHBISHOPS AND BISHOPS,
PRESIDENTS OF THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCES
AND PARTICIPANTS IN THE SYMPOSIUM
PROMOTED BY THE COLLEGE OF CARDINALS**

Saturday, 18 October 2003

*Your Eminence, Dean of the College of Cardinals,
Your Eminences and Beatitudes,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,*

1. I listened with great attention to your [message](#), read by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Dean of the College of Cardinals. I am deeply grateful for his respectful greeting and cordial good wishes on behalf of everyone here.

I greet the Cardinals, the venerable Patriarchs, the Presidents of the Bishops' Conferences and all who have taken part in the Symposium you organized, at which you reviewed some of the doctrinal and pastoral approaches that have inspired the activity of the Successor of Peter in the past 25 years.

I offer you in particular, dear Brothers of the College of Cardinals, my sincere gratitude for the affectionate closeness that you make me feel, not only on this occasion but always, as this meeting, moreover, eloquently demonstrates. In a certain way, the sense of unity and collegiality that must motivate the sacred Pastors in their common service to the People of God is rendered more visible today. Thank you for your witness!

2. Thinking back over the past 25 years, I remember how often you have helped me with your advice to understand better the important questions concerning the Church and humanity. How could I fail to see that the Lord has acted through you in supporting the service to believers and to all men and women that is demanded of Peter?

Contemporary man, as the Dean of the College of Cardinals has wished to stress, is floundering in his breathless search for values. And - according to the intuition of Augustine in former times - he will never find peace except in loving God to the point of being prepared to make the sacrifice of himself.

The profound changes that have taken place in the past 25 years call into question our ministry as Pastors, appointed by God as fearless witnesses of truth and hope. We must never lack the courage to proclaim the Gospel; indeed, it must be our prime commitment to the last breath and we must undertake it with ever renewed dedication.

3. The one Gospel proclaimed with one heart and one soul: this is Christ's commandment, and it is this that the Church of today and of all time demands of us, as individuals and as a College. This is what today's men and women expect of us.

It is thus imperative that we foster among one another deep unity, which is not limited to affective collegiality but rooted in full doctrinal sharing and practically expressed in harmonious understanding.

How could we be authentic teachers for humanity or credible apostles of the new evangelization if we were to allow the discord of division to enter our hearts? The people of our time need Christ and his words of salvation. Indeed, the Lord alone can give true answers to the anxieties and questions of our contemporaries. He has sent us out into the world as a single, undivided College that must witness with a unanimous voice to him, to his words, to his ministry. Our credibility depends on this!

Our work will be all the more effective the better able we are to make the face of the Church shine out, the Church which *loves the poor*, which *is simple* and which *takes the part of the weakest*. [Mother Teresa of Calcutta](#), whom I will have the joy of adding to the Book of Saints tomorrow, is an emblematic example of this Gospel attitude.

4. Your Eminences, who have come from every continent and belong in a special way to the venerable Church of Rome, can give the Successor of Peter effective support in the fulfilment of his mission. With your ministry, with the wisdom you have acquired from your own culture, with the zeal of your consecration, you form a crown of honour that makes the face of Christ's Bride even more beautiful. This is another reason why you are asked to strive constantly for more complete fidelity to God and his Church. Indeed, holiness is the secret of evangelization and of any

authentic pastoral renewal.

As I assure each one of you of my remembrance in prayer, I ask you to continue to pray for me that I may carry out my service to the Church faithfully for as long as the Lord desires. May Mary, Mother of the Church, accompany and protect us, and may Luke the Evangelist whose feast we are celebrating today, intercede for us.

With these sentiments, I cordially impart to you all a special Apostolic Blessing.

After singing the "Our Father", Pope John Paul II personally greeted the 59 Presidents of the Episcopal Conferences and of the Pontifical Councils and presented the Prelates a Pectoral Cross designed by the Savi brothers.

MESSAGE OF THE COLLEGE OF CARDINALS TO THE HOLY FATHER

Holy Father,

The College of Cardinals has gathered to thank the Lord and you for your 25 years of fruitful work as Successor of St Peter, as it is only right to remember at this time. In these years, the Barque of the Church has often had to sail against the wind and on rough seas. The sea of history is agitated by conflicts between the rich and the poor, between peoples and cultures; by the prospects opened by human ability and the risk that human beings run of self-destruction because of these same possibilities. At times the sky appears to be covered by heavy clouds that conceal God from the eyes of men and women and call the faith into question.

Today more than ever, we are experiencing that the history of the world - as Augustine saw it - is a struggle between two forms of love: love of self to the point of contempt for God, and love of God to the point of being prepared to sacrifice oneself for God and for one's neighbour. And although the signs of people's presumption and of distancing themselves from God are being felt and perceived more than the witness of love, thanks be to God we can see today that his light has never been extinguished in history; the great array of Saints and Blesseds whom you, Holy Father, have raised to the honour of the altars, is an eloquent sign: in them we recognize with delight God's presence in history and his love, mirrored on the faces of the men and women blessed by God.

In this span of time, Your Holiness, constantly comforted by the loving presence of the Mother of

Jesus, you have guided us with the joy of faith, the undaunted courage of hope and the enthusiasm of love. You have enabled us to see God's light despite all the clouds, and made sure that the weakness of our faith, which all too easily prompts us to exclaim: "*Save us, Lord; we are perishing*" (Mt 8: 25), does not prevail. Today we wholeheartedly thank you for this service.

As a pilgrim of the Gospel, like the Apostles you set out and crossed the continents bearing the proclamation of Christ, the proclamation of the Kingdom of God, the proclamation of forgiveness, of love and of peace. Unflinchingly, you have proclaimed the Gospel *in season and out of season*, and in its light you have reminded all people of the fundamental human values: respect for human dignity, the defence of life, the promotion of justice and peace. Above all, you have gone out to meet the young, communicating to them the fire of your faith, your love for Christ and your willingness to dedicate yourself to him, body and soul.

You have been concerned with the sick and the suffering and have launched a passionate appeal to the world to share the goods of the earth equitably and so that the poor may have justice and love.

You have interpreted the commandment of unity that the Lord gave to his disciples as a commandment addressed to you personally; this has led you to do your utmost to make believers in Christ one, so that the benevolent power of God himself may be recognized in the miracle of unity that human beings are powerless to create. You have gone out to meet people of other religions, to reawaken in all the desire for peace and the readiness to become instruments of peace.

Thus, over and above all the barriers and divisions, you have become for all humanity a great messenger of peace. You have never ceased to appeal to the consciences of the powerful or to comfort those who are victims of the lack of peace in this world. In this way, you have obeyed the Lord who bequeathed this promise to his followers: "*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you*" (Jn 14: 27). Precisely in meeting the needs of others, you have never allowed anyone to doubt that Christ is the Love of God made flesh, the Only Son and Saviour of all. For you, to proclaim Christ is not to impose something foreign on anyone but to communicate to all what each one basically longs for: the eternal love that every human heart is secretly awaiting.

"The Redeemer of man is the centre of the universe and of history": these opening words of your first Encyclical were like a clarion call that invited us to a religious reawakening, centering all things once again in Christ.

Holy Father, the College of Cardinals, at the end of this Congress during which it has recalled only a few aspects of the 25 years of your Pontificate, desires unanimously to reaffirm its filial attachment to your person and its faithful, total loyalty to your lofty Magisterium as Pastor of the universal Church.

"*The joy of the Lord is your strength*", Ezra the priest said to the people of Israel at a difficult moment (Neh 8: 10). You, Holy Father, have rekindled in us this joy of the Lord. We are grateful to you for this. May the Lord always fill you with his joy.