



The Holy See

CLOSING OF THE SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL

HOMILY OF POPE PAUL VI

8 December 1965

Your eminences, venerable brothers, representatives of governments, gentlemen of the city of Rome, authorities and citizens of the entire world! You, observers belonging to so many different Christian denominations, and you, faithful and sons here present, and you also scattered across the earth and united with us in faith and charity!

You will hear shortly, at the end of this holy Mass, a reading of some messages which, at the conclusion of its work, the ecumenical council is addressing to various categories of persons, intending to consider in them the countless forms in which human life finds expression. And you will also hear the reading of our official decree in which we declare terminated and closed the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council. This is a moment, a brief moment of greetings. Then, our voice will be silent. This council is completely terminated, this immense and extraordinary assembly is disbanded.

Hence, this greeting which we address to you has particular significance, which we take the liberty of pointing out to you, not to distract you from prayer, but to occupy the better your attention in this present celebration.

This greeting is, before all, universal. It is addressed to all of you assisting and participating here in this sacred rite: to you, venerable brothers in the episcopate; to you, representatives of nations; to you, people of God. And it is extended and broadened to the entire world. How could it be otherwise if this council was said to be and is ecumenical, that is to say, universal? Just as the sound of the bell goes out through the skies, reaching each one within the radius of its sound

waves, so at this moment does our greeting go out to each and every one of you. To those who receive it and to those who do not, it resounds pleadingly in the ear of every man. From this Catholic center of Rome, no one, in principle, is unreachable; in principle, all men can and must be reached. For the Catholic Church, no one is a stranger, no one is excluded, no one is far away. Every one to whom our greeting is addressed is one who is called, who is invited and who, in a certain sense, is present. This is the language of the heart of one who loves. Every loved one is present! And we, especially at this moment, in virtue of our universal pastoral and apostolic mandate, we love all, all men.

Hence, we say this to you good and faithful souls who, absent in person from this gathering of believers and of nations, are here present in spirit with your prayer. The Pope is thinking of you too, and with you he celebrates this sublime moment of universal communion.

We say this to you, you who suffer like prisoners of your infirmities, to you who, if you were without the comfort of our heartfelt greeting, would, because of your spiritual solitude, experience a redoubling of your pain.

This we say especially to you, brothers in the episcopate, who through no fault of your own were missing from the council and now leave voids in the ranks of your brother bishops and still more in their hearts and ours, a void which gives us such sufferings and which condemns the injustices which shackle your liberty—would that this were all that was wanting to enable you to come to our council.

Greetings to you, brothers, who are unjustly detained in silence, in oppression, and in the privation of the legitimate and sacred rights owed to every honest man, and much more to you who are the workmen of nothing but good, piety and peace. To hindered and humiliated brethren, the Church is with you. She is with your faithful and with all those who have a part in your painful condition! May this also be the civil conscience of the world!

Lastly, our universal greeting goes out to you, men who do not know us, men who do not understand us, men who do not regard us as useful, necessary or friendly. This greeting goes also to you, men who, while perhaps thinking they are doing good, are opposed to us. A sincere greeting, and unassuming greeting but one filled with hope and, today, please believe that it is filled with esteem and love.

This is our greeting. But please be attentive, you who are listening to us. We ask you to consider how our greeting, differently from what ordinarily happens in day to day conversation, would serve to terminate a relationship of nearness or discourse. Our greeting tends to strengthen and, if necessary, to produce a spiritual relationship whence it draws its meaning and its voice. Ours is a greeting, not of farewell which separates, but of friendship which remains, and which, if so demanded, wishes to be born. It is even precisely in this last expression that our greeting, on the

one hand, would desire to reach the heart of every man, to enter therein as a cordial guest and speak in the interior silence of your individual souls, the habitual and ineffable words of the Lord: "My peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you, but not as the world gives it" (John 14:27)—Christ has His own special way of speaking in the secrets of hearts—and on the other hand, our greeting wants to be a different and higher relationship because it is not only a two-sided exchange of words among us people of this earth, but it also brings into the picture another present one, the Lord Himself, invisible but working in the framework of human relationships. It invites Him and begs of Him to arouse in him who greets and in him who is greeted new gifts of which the first and highest is charity.

Behold, this is our greeting. May it rise as a new spark of divine charity in our hearts, a spark which may enkindle the principles, doctrine and proposals which the council has organized and which, thus inflamed by charity, may really produce in the Church and in the world that renewal of thoughts, activities, conduct, moral force and hope and joy which was the very scope of the council.

Consequently, our greeting is in the ideal order. Is it a dream? Is it poetry? Is it only a conventional and meaningless exaggeration, as often happens in our day-to-day expression of good wishes? No. This greeting is ideal, but not unreal. Here we would ask for a further moment of your attention. When we men push our thoughts and our desires toward an ideal conception of life, we find ourselves immediately in a utopia, in rhetorical caricature, in illusion or delusion. Man preserves an unquenchable yearning toward ideal and total perfection, but of himself he is incapable of reaching it, perhaps not in concept or much less with experience or reality. This we know, it is the drama of man, the drama of the fallen king.

But note what is taking place here this morning. While we close the ecumenical council, we are honoring Mary Most Holy, the mother of Christ, and consequently, as we declared on another occasion, the mother of God and our spiritual mother. We are honoring Mary Most Holy, the Immaculate One, therefore innocent, stupendous, perfect. She is the woman, the true woman who is both ideal and real, the creature in whom the image of God is reflected with absolute clarity, without any disturbance, as happens in every other human creature.

Is it not perhaps in directing our gaze on this woman who is our humble sister and at the same time our heavenly mother and queen, the spotless and sacred mirror of infinite beauty, that we can terminate the spiritual ascent of the council and our final greeting? Is it not here that our post-conciliar work can begin? Does not the beauty of Mary Immaculate become for us an inspiring model, a comforting hope?

Oh, brothers, sons, and gentlemen who are listening to us, we think it is so for us and for you. And this is our most exalted and, God willing, our most valuable greeting.

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