



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II *ANGELUS* *First Sunday of Lent, 4 March 1979* 1. *Inclinate capita vestra Deo!* This exhortation reached us, as you know, in the period of Lent: "Bow your head before God!" And we do so. The first liturgical gesture with which we started it was precisely the act of bowing our heads on Wednesday last, Ash Wednesday. We bowed our heads to receive the ashes: "You are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Gen 3:19). This is the expression of our mortality; and at the same time a sign of our readiness for repentance and conversion: "Repent and believe in the Gospel" (Mk 1:15). Bowing the head may be interpreted as a gesture of humiliation or resignation. Bowing the head before God is a sign of humility. Humility, however, is not identified with humiliation or resignation. It is not accompanied by faint-heartedness. On the contrary. Humility is creative submission to the power of truth and love. Humility is rejection of appearances and superficiality; it is the expression of the depth of the human spirit; it is the condition of its greatness. St Augustine too reminds us of this. In a sermon he says: *Magnus esse vis? A minimo incipe. Cogitas magnam fabricam construere celsitudinis? De fundamento prius cogita humilitatis.* "Do you want to be a great? Begin from the smallest thing. Do you intend to construct a large building, which rises up very high? Take into consideration in the first place the foundation of humility" (St Augustine, *Serm.* 69, 2; PL 38, 441). This way of thinking is perhaps far removed from many manifestations of the modern mentality. We are often fascinated by apparent values, by exterior grandeur, by what is sensational, what agitates the surface of our psyche. Man becomes, in a certain sense, one-dimensional, detached from his own depth. He builds on foundations that are not deep. And he often suffers at the destruction of what he has built in himself so superficially. Lent calls for a deepening of our internal construction. And it is just this that gives rise to the call to humility, a virtue so significant in the whole Gospel message, the virtue so characteristic of Christ. *Inclinate capita vestra Deo!* Let us bow our heads: in order that the creative power of truth and love may embrace us. And the power of liberation. The power, by means of which man gets up again, thanks to which he grows. 2. Today, 4 March, my thought goes also to the Saint venerated in common by the Poles and Lithuanians: St Casimir, the son of the royal Jagiello family. Recommending to him both of his earthly countries, I feel I am also satisfying a need of the heart. 3. I also wish to express my deep sympathy and fatherly solidarity in the drama of the Neapolitan people afflicted by the illness and death of so many children: I pray earnestly to the Lord that he may soon end this painful ordeal and restore to them serenity and joy in life. 4. And together with you I wish to renew to the Almighty the heartfelt supplication that he may inspire and help the commitment of all those in authority, in order to extinguish every hotbed of war and

ensure to all peoples the priceless gift of peace.

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