



The Holy See

INAUGURATION OF THE 10th ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Sunday 30 September 2001

1. *"The Bishop, Servant of the Gospel of Jesus Christ for the Hope of the World".*

This is the theme for the work of the Tenth General *Ordinary* Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, which we are now opening in the name of the Lord. The Synod follows the series of *Special* Assemblies that dealt with the Churches of the six continents, in preparation for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000.

They all had in common the challenge of *evangelization*, as one can discover by reading the post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortations that have been published. Today's Synod can be placed, both in continuity with the preceding Ordinary Assemblies, dedicated to the various vocations of the People of God: the *laity* in 1978, the *priests* in 1990, *consecrated life* in 1994 and also it can be taken as a further response to the call for the new evangelization. Thus the treatment on *Bishops* fills out the picture of an ecclesiology of communion and mission, which we must keep before us.

With great joy I welcome you, dear and venerated Brothers in the Episcopate, coming from all over the world. Meeting and working together, under the guidance of the Successor of Peter, reveals "that all the Bishops in hierarchical communion partake of the solicitude for the Universal Church" (*Christus Dominus*, n. 5). I extend my cordial welcome to the other members of the Assembly and to those who in the following days will cooperate in its efficient development. In a special way, I thank the Secretary General of the Synod, Cardinal Jan Pieter Schotte, along with his collaborators, who actively prepared the present Synod session.

2. On Christmas Eve of 1999, inaugurating the Great Jubilee, after opening the Holy Door, /

crossed it holding in my hands the Book of the Gospels. This was a highly symbolic gesture. The Gospels contain the agenda of the Synod we are beginning today on the theme: "*The Bishop, Servant of the Gospel of Jesus Christ for the Hope of the World*".

The Bishop is "*minister, servant*". The Church is at the service of the Gospel. "*Ancilla Evangelii*" (servant of the Gospel): this is how it could be defined, echoing the words the Virgin Mary used at the Annunciation of the angel. Then Mary said "*Ecce ancilla Domini*" (Behold the servant of the Lord); the Church continues to say today "*Ecce ancilla Evangelii*" (Behold the servant of the Gospel).

"*Propter spem mundi*" (For the hope of the world). The hope of the world lies in Christ. In Him, the expectations of humanity find a real and solid foundation. The hope of every human being comes from the Cross, sign of the victory of love over hate, of forgiveness over revenge, of truth over falsehood, of solidarity over egoism. Our task is to make the proclamation of salvation to the men and women of our time.

3. "*Blessed are the poor in spirit*". We sang it in the refrain of the *Responsorial Psalm*.

The evangelical beatitude of poverty, is a precious message for the Synod Assembly that we are beginning. In fact, poverty is an essential trait of the person of Jesus and His ministry of salvation and represents one of the indispensable requirements for the evangelical proclamation to be heard and welcomed by today's humanity.

Listening to the First Reading, from the Prophet Amos, and paying attention to the famous parable of the "rich man" and poor Lazarus, as told by the Evangelist St Luke, we, venerable Brothers, are compelled to look into our hearts to discern what is *our attitude towards earthly goods* and the use we make of them. We are asked to verify to what extent *the personal and community conversion to an effective evangelical poverty* has taken place in the Church. I recall the words from Vatican Council II: "Just as Christ carried out the work of redemption in poverty and persecution, so the Church is called to follow the same route that she might communicate the fruits of salvation to men" (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 8).

4. The *route of poverty* will allow us to transmit to our contemporaries the "fruits of salvation". As Bishops we are called upon, therefore, to be poor at the service of the Gospel. To be servants of the revealed word, who when needed will *raise their voices in defence of the least*, denouncing the abuses against those whom Amos called the "carefree" and the "revelers". To be prophets is to point out with courage the social sins that are the fruit of consumerism, hedonism, and an economy that produces an unacceptable gap between luxury and misery, between the few "rich men" and the many "Lazarus's" condemned to misery. In every age, the Church was close to the least, and has had holy Pastors who sided, like intrepid apostles of charity, with the poor.

But for the Pastors' Word to be credible, they must give proof of conduct detached from private interests and attentive towards the weaker ones. They must give an *example* to the community entrusted to them, teaching and supporting the synthesis of principles of solidarity and social justice that make up the *social doctrine of the Church*.

5. "You, *man of God*" (I Tm 6,11): with this title St Paul qualifies Timothy in the Second Reading, just proclaimed. It is a page where the Apostle traces a programme of life for the Bishop that is perennially valid. The Pastor must be "a man of God"; his existence and his ministry are entirely under the divine lordship and draw light and vigour from the supreme mystery of God.

St Paul continues: "You, man of God... *You must aim to be upright and religious, filled with faith and love, perseverance and gentleness*" (cf. I Tm 6,11). How much wisdom in that "aim"! Episcopal Ordination does not infuse perfection of the virtues: the Bishop is called upon to continue his journey of sanctification with greater intensity, to reach the perfection of Christ, the perfect Man.

The Apostle adds: "*Fight the good fight of faith and seek to reach eternal life...*" (cf. I Tm 6,12). Striving for the Kingdom of God, dear Brothers, we face our daily toils for the faith, not looking for any other reward but the one God will give us at the end. We are called upon to give this "*noble profession of faith* before many witnesses" (cf. I Tm 6,12). The splendor of faith thus bears witness: it is the reflection of the glory of Christ in the words and gestures of each of His faithful ministers.

St Paul concludes: "*I charge you to keep the commandment unstained and free of reproach, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (cf. I Tm 6,14). "The commandment"! *This word contains all of Christ*. His Gospel, His witness of love, the gift of His Spirit that fulfills the law.

The Apostles received this inheritance from Him and entrusted it to us, to be preserved and handed on intact until the end of time.

6. Dear Brothers in the Episcopate! Christ repeats to us today: "*Duc in altum - Put out into the deep!*" (Lk 5,4). Following His invitation, we may reread the triple *munus* entrusted to us in the Church: *munus docendi, sanctificandi et regendi* (the ministry of teaching, sanctifying and governing (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, nn. 25-27; *Christus Dominus*, nn. 12-16).

Duc in docendo! (Lead in teaching). With the Apostle we will say: "Preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season, convince, rebuke and exhort - be unfailing in patience and in teaching" (II Tm 4,2).

Duc in sanctificando! (Lead in sanctifying). The "nets" we are called upon to cast among men are, first of all, the Sacraments, of which we are the principal dispensers, governors, guardians and

promoters (cf. *Christus Dominus*, n. 15). They form a sort of saving "net", which frees from evil and leads to the fullness of life.

Duc in regendo! (Lead in governing). As Shepherds and true Fathers, assisted by the Priests and other collaborators, we have the task of gathering the family of the faithful and in it fostering charity and brotherly communion (cf. *Christus Dominus*, n. 16).

As arduous and labourious a mission as this may be, we must not lose heart. With Peter and the first disciples we too with great confidence renew our sincere profession of faith: Lord, "*at your word I will lower the nets*" (Lk 5,5)! At Your Word, O Christ, we wish to serve Your Gospel for the hope of the world!

We trust in your motherly assistance, O Virgin Mary. You who guided the first steps of the Christian community, be a support and encouragement for us also. Intercede for us, Mary, whom, using the words of the servant of God Paul VI, we invoke as "Help of Bishops and Mother of Pastors". Amen!