



The Holy See

OPENING OF THE ACADEMIC YEAR OF ECCLESIASTICAL UNIVERSITIES **HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II**

Friday 24 October 2003

*Mass was concelebrated in St Peter's Basilica by Cardinal Zenon Grocholewski, Prefect of the Congregation for Catholic Education, for the opening of the academic year of the ecclesiastical universities in Rome. The following is the Homily for the Mass written by the Holy Father.*1. "May the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ enlighten the eyes of our hearts so that we may understand the signs of the new times" (*Gospel Acclamation*; cf. Eph 1: 17; Lk 21: 29-31). Today's liturgy invites us to ask God to illumine our hearts with the light of his grace. *Light and wisdom of the heart!* Here is the main road to the discovery of truth. Here is a precious good to implore for all the children of the Church, so that they may be able to face courageously the challenges of our times. The invocation of light for our hearts acquires a very special meaning at our liturgical assembly. This evening, in fact, the community of the *Roman ecclesiastical universities* has gathered round the altar at the beginning of the academic year. A new year of study and research is opening before you, dear brothers and sisters, which you will dedicate with care to acquiring a deeper knowledge of theology and the other disciplines, in order to prepare yourselves for your future pastoral tasks and responsibilities at the service of the Christian people. Accompany application to your studies with prayer, meditation and the constant search for the will of the Lord. In this way you will find it easier to read "the signs of the new times". The great Doctor of the Church, St Augustine, expressed this same requirement in a uniquely effective formula: "*Orent ut intelligant* - may they pray to understand" (*De Doctrina Christiana*, III, 56; *PL* 34, 89).2. With these sentiments, I am pleased to address my cordial welcome to you all, dear brothers and sisters who are taking part in this solemn celebration. First of all, I greet Cardinal Zenon Grocholewski, Prefect of the Congregation for Catholic Education. With him I greet the Grand Chancellors, the Rectors of the Universities, the Members of the Academic Staff and the Rectors of the Seminaries and Colleges. I address an affectionate thought to each one of you, dear young people who are studying in Rome, with a word of special encouragement for all of you who are beginning your university training this year. May you be conscious of the greatness of the gift you have received: to be able to complete your cultural, human and spiritual training in the city and Diocese of Rome, which has the privilege of preserving the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul, "pillars" of the Church. This gives you an opportunity to examine in depth and to have a closer view of the universal scope of the Church's mission, and also to be more perfectly in tune with her Magisterium.3. "*I do not the good I will to do, but the evil I do not intend*" (Rom 7: 19). In the First Reading from the Letter to the Romans (cf. Rom 7: 18-25) St Paul, painting a picture in strong and dramatic colours, points out the human inability to do good and avoid evil. But there is *a way out*: victory over evil comes to us from God's merciful goodness, manifested to the full in Christ. And as if with an impulse of joy, the Apostle exclaims: "*All praise to God through Jesus Christ Our Lord!*" (Rom 7: 25). Like Paul, the Church never ceases to proclaim this great "Good News", which is for everyone: Christ who died and rose has overcome evil and set us free from sin. *He is our salvation*. This salvific

proclamation rings out ceaselessly in our time too, and constitutes the heart of the ecclesial community's mission. Man today - as in the past - seeks satisfying answers to the questions on the meaning of his life and death. During the period of theological formation, dear young people, you prepare yourselves to be able to provide faith responses adapted to the language and mindset of our time. May everything, therefore, be directed to this exalted mission: the proclamation of Christ and the liberating power of his Gospel.⁴ *"You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky; but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?"* (Lk 12: 56). With these words, too, Jesus urges us to face the realities of our time. If, on the one hand, your hearts must never be detached from contemplation of the mystery of God, on the other, you must keep *your gaze fixed on the events of the world and of history*. The Second Vatican Council said in this regard that the Church has always had the duty "of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel. Thus, in language intelligible to each generation, she can respond to the perennial questions which men ask about this present life and the life to come, and about the relationship of the one to the other" (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 4). May this be the spirit in which you dedicate yourselves to study during these years of your theological and pastoral formation. May the Virgin Mary, Seat of Wisdom, watch over your daily work at the Pontifical Universities of Rome. May she, the first evangelizer, accompany you and obtain that you are properly prepared to be authentic apostles of the Gospel of Christ. Amen! © Copyright 2003 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana