



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE RECTOR AND SEMINARIANS OF ROME'S ALMO COLLEGIO CAPRANICA

Tuesday, 19 January 1999

*Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and the Priesthood,
Dear Students of the Capranica College,*

1. It is a joy to receive you today to mark the feast of your patroness, the holy virgin and martyr Agnes. I cordially greet each of you, who come from various nations. In particular, I greet the rector, Mons. Michele Pennisi, and thank him for his words offered not only in your name, but in the name of Cardinal Camillo Ruini and the members of the special commission which oversees your "Almo Collegio". I thank you all from my heart!

I greatly appreciated the educational goal you have set for this community year. In line with the preparation for the Great Jubilee, it is expressed in the theme: "*Charity and mission: as children of the one Father we live brotherhood by freely serving and welcoming others*". This is a formation process that will lead you to engage in an increasingly intense and profound dialogue with Jesus, so that later you can bear witness to his saving love among your brothers and sisters.

2. At the origin of every mission in the Church is the call to love. "Looking upon him, he loved him": with these words the Evangelist Mark recounts Jesus' meeting with the young man who "had great possessions" (Mk 10:22). As an alternative to the many things we could own, the Lord offers the one thing that is essential: to leave everything for love and to follow him: "Come, follow me" (ibid., 10:21).

The virgin and martyr Agnes responded with total generosity and an undivided heart to Christ's invitation: she made her own existence an "eloquent and attractive example of a life completely transfigured by the splendour of moral truth" (cf. *Veritatis splendor*, n. 93). Because of this, she herself was able to brighten "every period of history by reawakening its moral sense" (ibid.). Her example encouraged many believers over the centuries to follow in her footsteps. Your College quite rightly chose her as its patroness and today you too look to her as a model to imitate.

Along with her witness you also have that of several students of your seminary, whose beatification causes are under way. The rector recalled them a few moments ago: may their lives spur each of you to be more and more faithful in doing what the Lord will ask of you. May everything in your life be for his greater glory and for the salvation of souls.

3. Our meeting is taking place in the year dedicated to the Father, as we now rapidly approach the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. I would invite you to turn your gaze to the Holy Door, through which we will enter the Jubilee Year in a spirit of profound conversion. Indeed, we must come to that event with hearts renewed. It is up to priests, in the first place, to be the witnesses and apostles of authentic personal and community renewal. How then in view of the feast of St Agnes, could we not consider the possibility of a heroic fidelity that might, if necessary, reach the point of martyrdom?

I would like to repeat to you today what I proclaimed to the whole Church: "The believer who has seriously pondered his Christian vocation, including what Revelation has to say about the possibility of martyrdom, cannot exclude it from his own life's horizon" (*Incarnationis mysterium*, n. 13).

I say these words, which may seem hard and demanding, "to you, young men, because you are strong", to borrow the words in which the Apostle John describes you (1 Jn 2:14). The world expects total dedication and holiness of life from those whom the Lord calls to serve him most closely. May this be your first concern. Open your hearts to the action of the Holy Spirit and entrust yourselves confidently to the heavenly Father, especially this year.

May Mary, the faithful Virgin, St Agnes and your other holy patrons guide you. For my part, as I assure you of a special remembrance in prayer, I impart my affectionate Blessing to you all and to your loved ones.