



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE PLENARY MEETING
OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE LAITY**

Monday, 1 March 1999

Your Eminences,

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. Your plenary assembly, which is being held these days in Rome, gives me the pleasant occasion of this meeting with you who work with the Pope in serving the laity throughout the world. My greetings and thanks go first to the President of the dicastery, Cardinal James Francis Stafford, to the Secretary, Bishop Stanisław Rylko, and also to each member and consultor of the *Pontifical Council for the Laity*, as well as to the whole staff.

The work of your plenary assembly has been focused on the importance of the sacrament of Confirmation in the life of laity. This reflection follows logically on your consideration of Baptism at your last assembly. In fact, as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches: "Confirmation perfects baptismal grace; it is the sacrament which gives the Holy Spirit in order to root us more deeply in the divine filiation, incorporate us more firmly into Christ, strengthen our bond with the Church, associate us more closely with her mission, and help us to bear witness to Christian faith in words accompanied by deeds" (n. 1316). The "new creature", reborn by baptismal grace, becomes a witness to the new life in the Spirit and a herald of God's great works. "The confirmed person", explains St Thomas, "receives the power to profess faith in Christ publicly and as it were officially (*quasi ex officio*)" (Sum. Th., III, 72, 5, ad 2; cf. CCC, n. 1305).

2. "Lay people: confessors of the faith in today's world". The theme chosen for your plenary assembly contains a whole plan of life: to become "confessors of the faith" in word and deed. Is this not a providential invitation to the lay faithful on the threshold of the third millennium of the Christian era? On the eve of the Jubilee, in this particular *kairós*, the whole Church is called to present herself humbly before the Lord, to make a serious examination of conscience, to resume the journey of profound conversion, of Christian maturity, of faithful adherence to Christ in holiness

and truth, the journey of authentic witness to the faith. This examination of conscience must also include the reception given to the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council - the ecclesial event which has most greatly marked our century - as well as to its enlightening teaching on the dignity, vocation and mission of lay people.

The Jubilee therefore spurs every lay Christian to ask himself some fundamental questions: What have I done with my Baptism? How am I responding to my vocation? What have I done with my Confirmation? Have I made the gifts and charisms of the Spirit bear fruit? Is Christ the "Thou" always present in my life? Am I fully and deeply a member of the Church, mystery of missionary communion, as willed by her Founder and as realized in her living Tradition? In my decisions, am I faithful to the truth taught by the Church's Magisterium? Is my marital, family and professional life imbued with Christ's teaching? Is my social and political involvement based on Gospel principles and the social doctrine of the Church? What contribution do I make to creating ways of life more worthy of man and to inculturating the Gospel amid the great changes taking place?

3. With the Second Vatican Council, "the great gift of the Spirit to the Church at the end of the second millennium" (*Tertio millennio adveniente*, n. 36), we have experienced the grace of a renewed Pentecost. Many signs of hope have sprung from it for the Church's mission; I have never failed to point them out, to emphasize and to encourage them. I am thinking, among other things, of the rediscovery and appreciation of the charisms which have fostered a more vital communion between the different vocations given to the People of God, of renewed zeal for evangelization, of the advancement of lay people and their participation and co-responsibility in the life of the Christian community, of their apostolate and their service in society. At the dawn of the new millennium, these signs encourage us to expect a mature and fruitful "epiphany" of the laity.

At the same time, however, how can we ignore the fact that unfortunately many Christians, forgetful of their baptismal commitments, live in indifference, yielding to compromise with the secularized world? How can we not mention those faithful who, while active in their own way in the ecclesial communities, are attracted to the relativism of contemporary culture and find it difficult to accept the Church's doctrinal and moral teachings, to which every baptized person is called to adhere?

I hope, then, that the laity will not shirk this examination of conscience, so that they can pass through the Holy Door of the third millennium strengthened in the truth and holiness of authentic disciples of Jesus Christ. "You are the salt of the earth.... You are the light of the world.... Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Mt 5:13-16). The world needs the witness of "new men" and "new women" who, in word and deed, make Christ present in an ever more powerful way, for Christ is the only complete and superabundant answer to the longing for truth and happiness in the human heart. He is the "cornerstone" for building a more human civilization.

4. Through its initiatives, the Pontifical Council for the Laity has played an important role in the growth of the lay faithful in the past few years. Among its recent initiatives, I would like to recall the World Youth Day in Paris in August 1997, the meeting with ecclesial movements and new communities on 30 May 1998 in St Peter's Square, the document on "*The Dignity of Older People and Their Mission in the Church and in the World*", published for the International Year for Older Persons, proclaimed by the United Nations for 1999 and a guiding principle for preparing the Jubilee of older people. I know that your dicastery is already involved in preparing the World Youth Day of the Year 2000 and that, in collaboration with other dicasteries of the Roman Curia, it is organizing a seminar on the theme: "*Ecclesial movements and new communities in the pastoral concern of Bishops*".

5. In line with the teaching of the Second Vatican Council and the Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, other initiatives of the Pontifical Council for the Laity which involve the vast and fertile field of the Catholic laity will take place during the Jubilee Year. I will reflect for a moment on one of the most important: the *World Congress on the Apostolate of the Laity*, planned in Rome for November 2000. This congress, which will be a Jubilee event especially for those who attend it, will sum up the laity's progress from the Second Vatican Council to the Great Jubilee of the Incarnation. Although it should be seen in continuity with similar meetings that have taken place in the past, its specific features and goals should be carefully studied. Taking place towards the end of the Year 2000, it will be enriched by everything it has experienced in this year of the Lord's grace and will show lay people the tasks that await them in the various areas of their mission and service to man at the beginning of the third millennium.

6. Dear brothers and sisters, I close these reflections with the hope that the work of your plenary assembly will bear great fruit in the life of the Church. I accompany your dicastery's initiatives for the Great Jubilee with my prayers, and I entrust their results to the intercession of the Virgin Mary, Mother of God and Mother of the Church. I wish all of you here, your families and your loved ones, abundant graces for the Jubilee Year, and from my heart I give you all my Apostolic Blessing.