



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II
TO THE FAITHFUL
OF THE DIOCESE OF ALBANO**

Sunday, 27 August 2000

1. I am pleased to welcome you at this special audience, dear brothers and sisters of the Diocese of Albano. My affectionate greetings to you all, authorities, priests, seminarians, permanent deacons, religious and lay people!

I thank Bishop Agostino Vallini for his warm address to me. With him, I thank your two representatives who have expressed your sentiments well. I would like to extend a special greeting to Cardinal Angelo Sodano, Secretary of State, as well as to Auxiliary Bishop Paolo Gillet. I also cordially greet our dear guest, Bishop George Biguzzi of Sierra Leone.

I am grateful to you all, people of the ancient Suburbicarian Church of Albano, who have come in such large numbers to this meeting. I have very often experienced your devotion and affection, especially during my stay in Castel Gandolfo. These sentiments have ancient roots: the Appian Way, which crosses your territory, was taken by the holy Apostles Peter and Paul, and the faith they preached was professed in blood by your martyrs and patrons, Sts Pancras, Senator and Companions. The vital sap of these apostolic roots and the blood of the martyrs nurtured the genuine Christian faith which has come down to the present generations in such shining testimonies as the martyrdom of St Maria Goretti.

2. May I be permitted to recall the meeting I had with you in 1985, in preparation for the *Diocesan Synod*. On that occasion you presented to me the pastoral programme your ecclesial community was preparing in order to adapt its apostolic action to the changed requirements of the times. I remember that at the time I invited you "*to walk together*". The Synod took those words as its motto. This commitment remains very timely today.

The Church is a community of brothers and sisters who live by the life-giving power of the Spirit of the risen Christ. They express not only the unity of their hearts in spiritual communion, but also pastoral co-responsibility. Building up the Church means walking together on the ways of holiness and apostolic service, appearing as *a community hierarchically structured around its Pastor*.

However, without taking anything from the riches and variety of individual pastoral experiences, "walking together" means not yielding to the temptation of fragmentation and lack of focus, the result of an uncontrolled apostolic will.

May you in particular, dear priests who form one presbyterate, *be witnesses of unity among your people*. Being *faithful to Christ* - always remember - means *being faithful to the Church*. I therefore urge you to foster priestly communion around the Bishop, whose task is to authenticate the Church's journey and pastoral practice.

3. The celebration of your Diocesan Synod resulted in a pastoral programme *focused on certain precise objectives*, including the new evangelization, the pastoral care of families and attention to and care of youth. What a vast field of missionary action lies before you, dear priests, religious and lay people!

Evangelization, above all! It must become your constant priority commitment. The challenges of secularism and dechristianization require you to take courageous action, accompanied by innovation, clear analysis and trust in the power of the Holy Spirit. At the Ecclesial Convention in Palermo, I previously noted: "Our age is not a time for merely preserving what exists, but for mission. It is a time to offer something new, and first and foremost Jesus Christ, the heart of the Gospel" (*Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, vol. XVIII/2, 1995, p. 1196). Your Diocesan Synod has taken a very appropriate decision in seeing that no one lacks the nourishment of evangelization.

As for the *family institution*, we are well aware that in our time it has undergone profound and rapid changes caused by society and culture. Marriage and the family are one of humanity's most precious goods. Your Synod has therefore rightly devoted ample reflection to this subject and committed itself to a family ministry project. In its fulfilment of this commitment, I would like to encourage the diocesan community, in the hope that every Christian family will become involved in an active and fruitful apostolate.

4. The Synod then turned its attention to the *world of youth*. There are certainly many urgent pastoral needs, but that of young people is the most obvious and pressing, because in young people the future advances and the face of the Church and of society in the new millennium is presaged.

The world of youth certainly has problems, but *it also holds an immense potential for good*.

World Youth Day, which we celebrated several days ago, was a splendid confirmation of how right it is to trust in the new generation and to offer them positive opportunities so that they can meet Christ and follow him generously. Therefore dedicate effective pastoral energy to young people and organize meeting places where, after receiving their first Christian initiation, they can develop the authentic values of human and Christian life in a joyful community atmosphere.

Be concerned as well for the many young people who are not part of the ecclesial community and who gather on the streets and in the squares, exposed to risks and dangers. The Church cannot overlook or underestimate this growing youth phenomenon! They should be approached by specially trained pastoral workers who open horizons to them that rouse their interest and natural generosity, and gradually lead them to accept the person of Jesus Christ.

5. In your Diocese, too, one problem has become particularly acute: *priestly and religious vocations*. It is primarily the task of priests, particularly parish priests, to proclaim the Gospel of the call with passion, discerning and nurturing the seeds of vocations to the priesthood and the consecrated life by their words and witness of life. Their action must be coordinated and supported at the diocesan level with timely initiatives and, above all, be accompanied by the insistent prayer of the faithful.

Lastly, I would like to express my deep satisfaction with the sensitivity and dedication which the Diocese of Albano shows *in the field of hospitality* to our many brothers and sisters, especially immigrants, who are experiencing privations and hardships of every kind, far from their native land and the affection of their loved ones. I encourage you to persevere in this work of mercy, mindful of the Saviour's words: "I was a stranger and you welcomed me" (*Mt 25: 35*).

As you see, there are still many things to be done. I entrust your good intentions to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, to whom I know you have a very deep devotion. May Mary grant her protection to your "walking together" with your new Pastor.

With this wish I impart my affectionate Blessing to him - who celebrates his name day tomorrow, St Augustine - and to you all.