



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE CARDINALS, PAPAL HOUSEHOLD

AND ROMAN CURIA Monday, 22 December 2003 Your Eminences,

Distinguished Members of the Roman Curia and Prelature,¹ As Christmas draws near, the invitation of the liturgy becomes ever more pressing: *Descendit de caelis Salvator mundi. Gaudeamus!* It is an invitation to *spiritual joy*, of which the Liturgy explains the reason: "*The Saviour came down from Heaven*". The Messiah expected and invoked by the Prophets was born in Bethlehem, in a poor grotto: the Son of God became one of us. Mary continues to offer him to the people of every age and every culture: indeed, he was born for the salvation of all. These are my sentiments at this customary end-of-the-year event to which we look forward. The Cardinal Dean has expressed fervent good wishes to me on your behalf for the imminent festivities against the background of the celebrations for the 25th anniversary of the Pontificate. I thank him and greet him, as I also greet you, Your Eminences, Bishops and Prelates, embracing in a single act of gratitude and affection the officials and collaborators of the Roman Curia, of the Vicariate of Rome and of the Governorate of Vatican City State. I am spiritually close to you and grateful for the work you do at the service of the Chair of Peter, each one in accordance with his own talents and responsibilities. May Jesus who is born fill you with his gifts of grace and goodness, and reward you for your daily work, often done in silence and concealment. Please express my sentiments to the priests, Religious and lay people who work with you.² I remember the first meeting with the Members of the Roman Curia, which took place on 22 December - just like today - in 1978. Twenty-five years ago! I would like to tell you straight away, dear brothers, that during these years I have been able to admire with gratitude the intelligence and dedication with which you carry out your service to the Successor of Peter. "*Vos estis corona mea* (you are my crown)", I said to you at that time with St Paul (cf. Phil 4: 1). I gladly repeat it today: "You have become in a very special way my 'kinsmen', in accordance with that transcendent and very real communion... which is called and is ecclesial life" (*L'Osservatore Romano* English edition [ORE], 8 January 1979, p. 6). How could I have carried out the tasks entrusted to me without your faithful collaboration? I remember with deep gratitude all those who have succeeded one another in past years in their respective offices. I pray every day for those whom the Lord has already called to himself, asking him for the reward they deserve.³ We all work for one goal: *to proclaim the Gospel of Christ for the world's salvation*. It is a mission that we want to fulfil with a spirit of faith, willing, if need be, to sacrifice ourselves to the "*passio sanguinis*" (the out pouring of blood) of which St Augustine speaks. Indeed, as the Bishop of Hippo observes, we are at the service of a flock that is not bought with gold or silver, but with Christ's blood (cf. *Sermo* 296, 4: Discorsi V, Città Nuova, p. 326). May we never lack fidelity to the One who has bound us closely to his priesthood! *May he alone always be the centre of our life: Christ!* With the passing of the years this knowledge grows deeper and deeper within me: Jesus asks us to be his witnesses, concerned solely with his glory and the good of souls. I wanted to point this out in the Encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* as well as in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortations *Ecclesia in Europa* and *Pastores Gregis*, promulgated

in the course of 2003. I aimed at this when I recently published the Apostolic Letter *Spiritus et Sponsa* on the 40th anniversary of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* and the Chirograph for the centenary of the *Motu Proprio Tra le Sollecitudini* on Sacred Music. And was it not the love for Christ that prompted *the College of Cardinals* to meet in October - together with the Presidents of the Bishops' Conferences and the Patriarchs - for a broad and deep reflection on the needs of evangelization today? Love for Christ also guided *the Apostolic Visits* that I made this year to [Spain](#), [Croatia](#), [Bosnia and Herzegovina](#) and [the Republic of Slovakia](#). Lastly, the knowledge of Christ's desire for the unity of believers - "*ut unum sint*" (Jn 17: 22) - was an incentive to build up *ecumenical relations* with the representatives of the venerable Orthodox Churches, with the Primate of the Anglican Communion and with Leaders of other Churches and Ecclesial Communities, especially those working in Europe.⁴ Europe! I cannot but observe that this year the European Continent has been through and is continuing to live *a crucial phase in its history*, while it is extending its boundaries to other peoples and nations. It is important that Europe, enriched down the ages by the treasure of the Christian faith, *should strengthen its origins and revive its roots*. The most important contribution that Christians are called to make to building the new Europe is first and foremost fidelity to Christ and to the Gospel. Europe first needs *saints and witnesses*. The beatification and canonization ceremonies celebrated in the course of the year have made it possible to hold up as outstanding models to imitate several of Europe's sons and daughters. It will suffice to remember *Mother Teresa of Calcutta*, an icon of the Good Samaritan, who became a messenger of love and peace for everyone, believers and non-believers alike.

5. To be witnesses of peace, *educate for peace!* This is another particularly urgent commitment for our time, when risks and threats to the serene coexistence of humanity can still be seen gathering on the horizon. The solemn commemoration of the Encyclical *Pacem in Terris* of Bl. John XXIII in the 40th year after its promulgation revived in us the optimism imbued with Christian hope of that great Pontiff in times that were just as difficult as ours. Peace is still possible today too, and if peace is possible, it is a duty. This is what I wanted to repeat in the *Message for the next World Day of Peace*. May the Child of Bethlehem, whom we are preparing to receive in the mystery of Christmas, bring the precious gift of his peace to the world. May Mary obtain this for us, [Our Lady to whose Shrine in Pompei I went on pilgrimage last October](#) as the solemn culmination of the [Year of the Rosary](#). With these sentiments I offer my best wishes to you all for the forthcoming Christmas festivities and for the New Year, and I cordially bless you all. Happy Christmas!