



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE STUDENTS OF THE "ALMO COLLEGIO CAPRANICA"

Saturday, 18 January 2003

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,

*Dear Students of the Almo Collegio Capranica,*1. The approach of the Feast of St Agnes offers us again the pleasant occasion for our encounter this year. With affection I greet each of you. I especially greet Cardinal Camillo Ruini and I thank him for his courteous words of greeting spoken in the name of all. With him I greet the members of the Commission that follows the Collegio Capranica, with a special greeting for the Rector, Mons. Alfredo Abbondi, who was appointed a short time ago. With all my heart I hope, with the coming of the new formation team and with the contribution of everyone, all of you dear students, may know how to make headway with your enthusiasm and participation in the last stage of your formation, growing in fraternal communion, in a way that offers the example of a united spiritual family growing in the desire for the service of God and the brethren.2. St Agnes, Virgin and Martyr, is the protectress of your Almo Collegio who at a young age - she was only twelve years old - knew how to give to the Lord Jesus the last witness of martyrdom in an age in which the Christian community recorded many who fell away. On the day of her feast, that we celebrate on 21 January, the liturgy invites us to ask God for the strength "to imitate her heroic constancy in the faith" (cf. *Collect*). In fact, dearly beloved, this is the lesson that we can take from St Agnes: *her heroic constancy in the faith* "even to the shedding of her blood". This young martyr invites us to persevere with fidelity in our mission, even to the point of sacrificing our life, if necessary. It calls for an interior disposition that must be nourished daily by prayer and a serious ascetical programme.3. Priests, called to be enlightened guides and coherent examples of Christian life for the People of God, cannot fall short of the faith that the Lord and his Church place in them. They must be holy and they must be educators of holiness with their teaching, but even more with their witness. This is the "martyrdom" to which God calls them, a martyrdom which, even though it does not involve violent bloodshed, always requires that bloodless but "heroic constancy in the faith" which characterizes the existence of true disciples of Christ. May God be pleased to grant this to each of you. I entrust this prayer to the maternal protection of the Blessed Virgin and to the constant intercession of St Agnes. With these sentiments and wishing you a serene and profitable year, from my heart I bless you.