



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY
OF THE CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERGY**

Saturday, 10 January 2004

*Your Eminences,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

1. I welcome you with pleasure at the end of the Plenary Assembly of the Congregation for the Clergy. I greet the Prefect of the Dicastery, Cardinal Darío Castrillón Hoyos, and I thank him for expressing your common sentiments of devotion and affection. I greet Your Eminences, the Venerable brothers in the Episcopate and all who participated in this meeting, which dealt with two very interesting topics: "The consultative organisms *secundum legem* and *praeter legem*" and "the pastoral care of Shrines".

I wish to thank each one of you for the exacting work achieved. At the same time, I express my sincere hope that these days of reflection will provide helpful indications and directions for the life of the Church.

2. The Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* presents the Church as a people with Christ as its Head, whose state is the dignity and freedom of the sons of God; whose law is the ancient and always new precept of love and whose destiny is the kingdom of God (cf. n. 9). Included are those who, by way of Baptism, are "*living stones... built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ*" (I Pt 2: 5).

This priesthood, which associates all believers, differs essentially from the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood; both, however, are closely bound and ordered towards one another, so that "each in its own proper way shares in the one priesthood of Christ" (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 10).

Pastors have the responsibility to form, sustain and sanctify the People of God, while lay faithful, together with them, play an active part in the Church's mission in a constant synergy of effort and respecting the specific vocations and charisms.

3. This helpful collaboration of the laity is found also within the various Councils provided for by canonical regulations at the diocesan and parochial levels. These are participatory organisms which offer their cooperation for the good of the Church in keeping with the knowledge and competence of each one (cf. can. 212 3 *CIC*).

Today these structures, resulting from the Council indications, need their mandate for action and their statutes to be updated according to the regulations of the Code of Canon Law promulgated in 1983. It is necessary to maintain a balanced relationship between the role of the laity and that pertaining to the Ordinary of the Diocese or to the parish priest.

Legitimate Pastors, in carrying out their office, are never to be considered as simple executors of the decisions resulting from the majority consensus opinion expressed by the ecclesial assembly. Church structure cannot employ simply human political models. Her hierarchical composition is based on the will of Christ and, as such, is part of the "*depositum fidei*", which must be conserved and transmitted in its entirety down the centuries.

Your Dicastery, which has an important role in the application of the conciliar directives in this matter, will not fail to follow attentively the development of such organs of consultation. I am certain that the proposals and outcome of this meeting will help to make the collaboration between the laity and Pastors always more profitable and entirely faithful to the directives of the Magisterium.

4. The second theme that you addressed at this Plenary Assembly deals with the pastoral care of Shrines. These sacred places attract numerous faithful who are searching for God and are therefore ready for a deeper proclamation of the Good News and open to the invitation to conversion. It is thus important that priests with strong pastoral sensibility exercise their ministry here, moved by apostolic zeal, gifted with a paternal spirit of welcome and versed in the art of preaching and catechesis.

What can be said, then, of the Sacrament of Penance? The confessor, especially in Shrines, is called to reflect the merciful love of Christ in every gesture and word. This requires, therefore, an appropriate doctrinal and pastoral training.

At the centre of every pilgrimage there are the liturgical celebrations, with Holy Mass in the first place. These are always to be prepared with care and conducted with great devotion, stimulating the faithful's active participation.

May your Dicastery not fail to draw up useful suggestions to help the pastoral service of Shrines and to be renewed so as to correspond better to the needs of the times.

5. Dear Brothers and Sisters, with these days of study and revision, you have rendered a meritorious service to the Church. I thank you and assure each one of you a brotherly remembrance in prayer.

May the Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church, who during the Christmas season we contemplate with the Child in the Manger, sustain you and make fruitful your every good proposal. To you and those dear to you I express my best wishes for the new year just begun and I cordially impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you all.