



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II

TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY

OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE LAITY Thursday, 25 November 2004 Your Eminences,

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*1. I welcome you with joy on the occasion of the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Laity. I warmly greet the President, Archbishop Stanisław Rylko, and thank him for his words on your behalf. I greet the Members and Consultors, Officials and Staff of this Dicastery, dedicated to carrying out its mission to strengthen the baptized by knowledge of their own identity and Christian vocation through a wealth of initiatives.2. I am thinking, for example, of the Meeting of Catholics of Eastern Europe, organized last year in Kiev, Ukraine, which highlighted the role that the lay faithful played in the spiritual and material rebuilding of those nations after long years of atheistic totalitarianism. I am also aware of your Pontifical Council's attention to the new season of lay association, which is marked by closer collaboration between the various groups, communities and movements. The "Repertoire of international associations of the faithful" is most useful in this regard. Furthermore, I have been informed of the first steps of the "Church and Sports" Department that you have recently created, as well as of the reassuring results of the International Youth Forum on the university apostolate. Nor can I overlook the intense preparation for [World Youth Day](#) that will be celebrated in Cologne, Germany, in August 2005. This event, with the theme: "*We have come to worship him*" (Mt 2: 2), urges the whole Church and especially young people to set out like the Magi to meet the God who became Man for our salvation.3. Having completed the series of Assemblies dedicated to the sacraments of Christian initiation, you are beginning with this Plenary Meeting to reflect on the parish, a topic that will keep you busy in the coming years. The next stage, as is evident from your agenda, consists in helping the lay faithful rediscover the true face of the parish, the "most immediate and visible expression" of the Church which is "living in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters" (*Christifideles Laici*, n. 26). The parish is the vital cell that is the natural place for lay people to participate in the building and mission of the Church in the world. The parish provides a presence that constantly calls each person to think about the ultimate meaning of life; it is a door open to all, giving access to the path of salvation. In a word, it is the place par excellence for the proclamation of Christ and for formation in the faith. For this very reason, the parish must be constantly renewed so as to be a true "community of communities", capable of truly effective missionary action.4. During this year dedicated to the Eucharist, how could I fail to recall that the Eucharist is the pulsating heart of the parish, the source of its mission and a presence that ceaselessly renews each one? Indeed, parishes are "communities of the baptized who express and affirm their identity above all through the celebration of the Eucharistic Sacrifice" (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, n. 32). Dear brothers and sisters, I hope with all my heart that the reflection on the parish, which the Pontifical Council for the Laity has begun at this Meeting, will help everyone understand better that the parish community is the place for an encounter with Christ and the brethren. I accompany you with my prayers, as I entrust you and your loved ones to the

motherly protection of Mary, Mother of God and Mother of the Church. With these sentiments, I bless you all.

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