



The Holy See

*ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL I
TO THE SACRED COLLEGE OF CARDINALS*

*Consistory Hall
Wednesday, 30 August 1978*

Venerable Brothers,

It is with great joy that we see you gathered around us for this meeting which we have earnestly desired. Now, thanks to your courtesy, we are allowed to experience its delight and comfort. In fact, we have felt the impelling need not merely to renew the expression of our gratitude for the choice reserved by you for our humble person—but this indeed does not cease to surprise and confuse us—but likewise to testify to the trust that we have in your fraternal and assiduous collaboration. The load which the Lord, in the inscrutable designs of his providence, has willed to place on our weak shoulders would indeed appear to be too weighty if we were not able, in addition to the omnipotent power of his grace, to count upon the affectionate understanding and the active solidarity of Brothers so illustrious for doctrine and wisdom, so experienced in pastoral government, so acquainted with the things of God and those of men.

Therefore, let us profit by this occasion to declare that we count first of all on the aid of those Eminent Cardinals who will remain near us in this noble City, directing the various Departments of which the Roman Curia is made up. The pastoral tasks to which, from time to time, divine Providence called us in previous years were always exercised far away from these complex organisms. These organisms offer to the Vicar of Christ the concrete possibility of carrying out the apostolic service which he owes to the whole Church. They ensure in that organic way the exercise of legitimate autonomies, yet in the indispensable respect of the essential unity of discipline, as well as that of faith, for which Christ prayed on the very eve of his passion (cf. Jn. 17:11, 21-23).

It is not difficult to recognize our inexperience in so delicate a sector of Church life. We promise

therefore to treasure the suggestions that will come to us from our worthy co-workers. We will be placing ourselves, one might say, in the school of those who through their well-deserved experience and recognition in these matters of great importance, deserve our full trust and our appreciative recognition as well. Next, our thoughts turn to you, Venerable Brothers, who will be returning to your dioceses once again to undertake the pastoral care of the churches entrusted to you by the Spirit (cf. Acts 20:28). You are already anticipating the joy of seeing your sons and daughters whom you know so well and love so deeply. This is a joy which will not be ours. The Lord knows the sadness that there is in our heart because of this. Above all though, in his goodness he knows how to temper the sadness of separation with the prospect of a still broader paternal responsibility. He especially comforts us with that inestimable gift of your loving and sincere support. In this, we experience that same response by all the Bishops of the world united to this Apostolic See with the strong bond of one communion.

This unity transcends space, ignores racial difference and enriches us with the true values present in diverse cultures. Though peoples differ in geographical location, in language and mentality, through this one communion, they become a single great family. How could one but feel a wave of a brightening hope in face of the marvellous spectacle your presence offers to a reflective spirit? It projects one's mind in the direction of the five continents represented in so dramatic and worthy a fashion by you.

Your presence places before us an eloquent image of the Church of Christ. The Catholic unity of this Church so moved the great Augustine and led him to keep in focus the "small branches" of the single particular churches so that they would not detach themselves "from that great tree which is spread throughout the world through the extension of its branches" (*Letter 185 to Boniface*, n. 8, 32). It is for this unity that we know we have been established both as a sign and as an instrument (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 22:2, 23:1). It is our goal to dedicate our total energy to the defence of this unity and indeed its increase. We are encouraged in this by our awareness that we can trust in the enlightened and generous action of each of you as well. We do not intend to restate the great themes of our programme which are already known to you. We would only wish to reconfirm in this moment together with you all, the commitment of our total availability to the guidance of the Spirit for the good of the Church. It was this that each of you promised on the day of your elevation to the Cardinalate, to serve "even to the shedding of your blood". Venerable Brothers, last Saturday we found ourselves faced with that momentous decision of saying "yes". We knew that this would place on our shoulders the formidable weight of the Apostolic ministry. One of you whispered in my ear encouraging words of trust and confidence. It is fitting then for us, having now been made the Vicar of the One who commanded Peter to "confirm your brothers" (Lk. 22:32), it is fitting for us to remind you that you are now to take up your respective ecclesiastical responsibilities with courage, with firm trust. Even in the difficulty of the present hour, we have the ever-present assistance of Christ. He repeats again to us today the words spoken when the darkness of the passion gathered over him, words spoken to that first group of believers, "Remember, I have overcome the world" (Jn. 16:33). In the name of Christ and with the pledge of our paternal

goodwill, we impart to you, to your collaborators, and to all the souls who come under your pastoral care, the first fruits of our propitious Apostolic Blessing.

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