



The Holy See

OPENING OF THE ACADEMIC YEAR OF THE ROMAN ECCLESIASTICAL UNIVERSITIES

EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION

HOMILY OF POPE JOHN PAUL II

Friday, 23 October 1998

1. *"The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein; for he has founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the rivers"* (Ps 24 [23]:1-2).

The psalmist's words, which resound in today's liturgy, recall God's lordship over the world. He created it and *entrusted it to man as a task*: a task that concerns both the field of knowledge and of action. In this sense, the world is man's vocation.

The Apostle Paul urges the Ephesians to conduct themselves *in a way worthy of the calling they have received* (cf. Eph 4:1). He speaks of the Christian vocation, which requires the baptized to follow Christ and to be conformed to him. But we can also understand the expression in a broader sense, in which the world itself in a way can be a calling for the human person, a calling which man has always tried to answer. Hence learning arose, that vast store of knowledge which is the fruit of wonder, insight, hypothesis and experience. Thus, down the centuries and generations, mankind's patrimony of learning takes form in the various periods of history.

2. All of us gathered here are heirs to this progressive growth of knowledge, developed by preceding generations. Particularly you, dear rectors, teachers and students of the Roman ecclesiastical universities, with your scholarly commitment you have joined this journey of research into the various theological, philosophical, humanistic, historical and juridical disciplines. I extend my cordial greetings to you all. With gratitude I greet Cardinal Pio Laghi, who is presiding at today's celebration, and with him the Grand Chancellors of the pontifical universities. It is important to start a new academic year with the awareness that we have received the treasure of culture as *a legacy from those who have gone before us*, and at the same time, *as a task for our own creative knowledge and action*.

Through knowledge man, in accordance with his particular nature, reaches out to the created world and relates it to himself. However, the world does not exhaust man's vocation.

3. The psalmist speaks of "ascending the mountain of the Lord":

"Who can ascend the mountain of the Lord? Or who may stand in his holy place?" (*Ps 24 [23]:3*).

In this image we find the full truth about man: created in the world and for the world, at the same time he is *called to ascend to God*.

By creating the human being in his own image and likeness, God called him to seek his "Prototype", the One he resembles more than any creature and in knowing whom he also knows himself. From this stems all man's metaphysical yearning. This makes him open to God's word, inclined to seek the One who is invisible and at the same time is the fullness of reality.

4. The psalmist continues: "He whose hands are sinless, whose heart is clean, who desires not what is vain, nor swears deceitfully to his neighbour. He shall receive a blessing from the Lord.... *Such is the race that seeks for him, that seeks the face of the God of Jacob*" (*Ps 24 [23]:4, 6*).

As I repeat these words, my thoughts turn immediately to you, dear students, gathered in large numbers at this by now traditional celebration: priests, consecrated persons and lay people. By studying the various disciplines, you are called to seek the Lord's "face", that is, the revelation of his mystery, just as Jesus Christ fulfilled it in a complete and definitive way.

"No one knows ... who the Father is except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him", as we have just heard in the Gospel of Luke (10:22). The mediation of Christ is absolutely essential for knowing the true face of God. His mediation concerns both *reason and the "heart"* inseparably, the order of knowledge and that of intention and behaviour. "He who does not love", the Apostle John observes, "does not know God; for God is love" (1 *Jn* 4:8). "He who says 'I know him' but disobeys his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 *Jn* 2:4).

5. The message in the biblical readings for this celebration belongs precisely to the level of the "heart". They recall that the Lord's face is sought and found in love (first reading) and in *simplicity* (Gospel).

Writing to the Ephesians, the Apostle forcefully recalls the primacy of love at the service of unity, which has its foundation in the Triune God: "one Spirit ... one Lord ... one God and Father" (*Eph* 4:4-6).

Each individual is endowed with gifts for building up the community; learning is also a precious gift, especially when it is profound and systematic. To bear fruit that benefits those who possess it and their brethren, it also needs *to be enriched with love*, without which the possession of all knowledge is useless (cf. 1 *Cor* 13:2).

Love should be accompanied by *simplicity of heart*, which belongs to those whom the Gospel, echoing the Lord Jesus' words, calls "children". "I offer you praise, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because what you have hidden from the

learned and the clever you have revealed to the merest children” (Lk 10:21). This marvellous blessing, which springs from Christ’s heart, reminds us that genuine intellectual maturity always goes hand in hand with simplicity. The latter does not consist in a superficiality of life and thought nor in denial of the problematic nature of reality, but rather in knowing how to go to the heart of every question and to discover its essential meaning and relationship to the whole. Simplicity is wisdom.

6. Dear brothers and sisters who comprise the great ecclesiastical academic community of Rome, I hope that the year which has just begun will help you grow in knowledge of the truth, which is the vocation and destiny of every human being. In the words of my recent Encyclical *Fides et ratio*, I hope that “those who love [true wisdom] may take the sure path leading to it and so find rest from their labours and joy for their spirit” (n. 6).

Realize that time devoted to study is not taken away from mission but is *for mission*. Last Sunday we celebrated World Mission Day. I would like to recall that the City Mission of the Diocese of Rome will take place next year, particularly in the various walks of life and, therefore, also in the universities. The ecclesiastical universities are special places of witness in the form of cultural mediation and of preparing those who are called to scatter the good seed of Gospel truth in the vast field of the Church.

May each of you seek, find and contemplate the face of the Lord in order to be an effective reflection of his light which fills human life with meaning.

May Mary, the shining torch of love and seat of wisdom, intercede for you and accompany you in this quest.

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