



The Holy See

INAUGURATION OF THE PONTIFICAL KOREAN COLLEGE IN ROME

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Friday, 23 March 2001

1. *"As a shepherd seeks out his flock ... so will I seek out my sheep.... I will bring them out from the peoples, and gather them from the countries"* (Ez 34: 12-13).

The words of the prophet Ezekiel, which we have just heard, testify to God's constant concern for his faithful ones, whom he has never tired of gathering "from every tribe and tongue and people and nation" throughout history. He brings them together to make them his "kingdom and priests" (cf. Rv 5: 9-10), carrying out his merciful plan of salvation.

This is what God has also done for the beloved Korean people, and today's celebration gives us a new occasion to thank him. This very year is the bicentenary of the great persecution of 1801, which claimed the lives of over 300 Christians in your homeland. Thanks to the courage of those witnesses to the faith and of others who followed their example, the Gospel seed, a seed of hope, did not die despite the successive waves of persecution. On the contrary, it gradually developed, giving the Church in your country solidity and an amazing growth. In truth, we can rightly say this evening that God has taken care of his faithful people.

2. *"Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one"* (Jn 17: 11).

Jesus' deeply consoling words have rung out in our assembly, taking us back to the Upper Room, to the dramatic eve of his death on the cross. They are words that continue over time to be proclaimed in the Church; words that have sustained countless martyrs and confessors of the faith in moments of difficulty and trial.

This evening I am thinking of the saints of beloved Korea and, among them, of St Andrew Kim Taegon, whom you have chosen as your patron. We can imagine that he often paused to meditate on the divine Teacher's words. At the crucial hour, encouraged by the Lord's prayer, he did not hesitate to "lose" everything (cf. *Phil 3: 8*) for him. He was faithful unto death. It is said that, while he was waiting to be executed, he encouraged his brethren in the faith with expressions that impressively echoed Jesus' prayer to the Father for his disciples. "Do not let misfortunes frighten you", he begged them; "do not lose heart and do not shrink from serving God, but, following in the footsteps of the saints, promote the glory of his Church and show yourselves true soldiers and subjects of God. Even if you are many, be of one heart; always remember charity; support and help one another, and wait for the moment when God will have mercy on you".

3. "*Be of one heart!*". St Andrew Kim Taegon exhorted believers to draw from divine love the strength to remain united and to resist evil. Like the early community, in which all were "of one heart and soul" (*Acts 4: 32*), the Korean Church had to find the secret of her own cohesion and growth in following the teaching of the Successors of the Apostles, in prayer and in the breaking of bread (cf. *Acts 2: 42*).

This same unity of intentions and the same spirit of love - I am certain - will be the soul of the Pontifical Korean College, which we are inaugurating with today's celebration. With this hope I cordially greet you, dear brothers and sisters. I extend a special greeting to Cardinal Stephen Kim Sou-hwan and the Bishops present, and I offer my particular gratitude to Bishop Michael Pak Jeong-il, who has expressed the sentiments you share. I also greet the College's rector, the student priests, the authorities present, the women religious staff and the other guests.

I would also like to mention the entire Christian community of your country, which is so dear to me, the Bishops and priests, the religious, the laity, the families and young people. I entrust each and every one to the intercession of St Andrew Kim Taegon, so that the love of God and neighbour may continue to fill the hearts and history of the Korean people.

4. This house, so ardently desired by the Bishops of Korea, will be a residence for seminarians and priests who will spend time in Rome to prepare specifically and intensely for the priestly ministry. In addition to taking academic courses at Rome's pontifical universities, they will be able to have a deeper understanding of their mission as witnesses of the Truth, apostles of Christ's Love, tireless heralds of the Gospel and zealous Pastors of the Christian people.

Their entire theological and pastoral formation will aim at enabling every priest to be *Christ for others*, a convincing sign of his love and his saving action. But where will they be able to learn the secret of this apostolic service if not in close contact with the Lord? Their first concern, therefore, can only be constant familiarity with Jesus in the Eucharist and trusting recourse in prayer to his grace and to the light of his Word.

5. "I have given them your word.... Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth" (Jn 17: 14, 17).

By meditating frequently on Jesus' discourse in the Upper Room, from which these words were taken, the residents of this College will acquire a better understanding of the mission to which priests are called. They will hear echoing in their spirit the Master's reassurance: "No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you" (Jn 15: 15).

Strengthened by constant communion with him, they will be able to proclaim with firm trust: "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want" (Ps 23: 1).

May this College breathe each day the atmosphere of the Upper Room! It is an indispensable atmosphere, as St Charles Borromeo said, "for bringing Christ to birth in us and in others" (St Charles Borromeo, *Acta Ecclesiae Mediolanensis*, Milan 1559, 1178).

May Korea's patron saints, especially St Andrew Kim Taegon, watch over all who live here. May the Immaculate Virgin, Mother of the Redeemer and Star of Evangelization, give them her special protection.