



The Holy See

**LETTER
OF THE HOLY FATHER
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO PRIESTS
FOR HOLY THURSDAY 1993**

1. *"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever"* (Heb 13:8).

Dear Brothers in the priesthood of Christ!

As we gather today in the many different Cathedral Churches throughout the world - members of the presbyteral communities of all the Churches together with the Pastors of the Dioceses - there come back to our mind with new force these words about Jesus Christ which became the recurring theme of the 500th anniversary of the evangelization of the New World.

"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever": these words refer to the *one eternal Priest*, who "entered once for all into the Holy Place... with his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption" (cf. Heb 9:12). Now the days have come - the "Triduum Sacrum" of the Church's sacred liturgy - in which, with even deeper veneration and worship, we renew the Passover of Christ, "his hour" (cf. Jn 2:4; 13:1), which is the blessed "fullness of time" (cf. Gal 4:4).

Through the Eucharist, this "hour" of Christ's redemption continues, in the Church, to be salvific. Today especially the Church recalls the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper. "I will not leave you desolate; I will come to you" (Jn 14:18). The "hour" of the Redeemer, the "hour" of his going forth from this world to the Father, the "hour" of which he himself says: "I go away, and I will come to you" (Jn 14:28). Precisely through his "paschal going forth", Christ constantly comes to us and remains present among us, by the power of the Spirit, the Paraclete. He is present sacramentally. He is present through the Eucharist. He is really present.

Dear brothers, *after the Apostles we have received this ineffable gift so that we may be ministers*

of Christ's *going forth* by way of the cross and, at the same time, of his *coming* in the Eucharist. How wonderful this Holy Triduum is for us! How wonderful for us is this day - the day of the Last Supper! We are ministers of the mystery of the redemption of the world, ministers of the Body which was offered and of the Blood which was shed so that sins might be forgiven. Ministers of that Sacrifice by which he, alone, entered once for all into the Holy Place. "Having offered himself without blemish to God, he purifies our conscience from dead works to serve the living God" (cf. Heb 9:14).

Although all the days of our life are marked by this great mystery of faith, today is even more so. This is our day with him.

2. On this day we gather together *in our priestly communities*, so that each one can contemplate more deeply the mystery of the Sacrament whereby we have become ministers in the Church of Christ's priestly offering. We have likewise become servants of the royal priesthood of the whole People of God, of all the baptized, so that we may proclaim the "*magnalia Dei*", the "mighty works of God" (Acts 2:11).

It is fitting to include in our thanksgiving this year *a particular element of gratitude* for the gift of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. This text is a response to the mission which the Lord has entrusted to his Church: to guard the deposit of faith and to hand it down intact, with authority and loving concern, to coming generations.

The result of the fruitful cooperation of the Bishops of the Catholic Church, the Catechism is entrusted above all to us, the Pastors of God's People, in order to strengthen our deep bonds of communion in the same apostolic faith. *As a compendium of the one perennial Catholic faith*, it constitutes a trustworthy and authoritative means for bearing witness to and ensuring that unity in faith for which Christ himself prayed fervently to the Father as his "hour" drew near (cf. Jn 17:21-23).

The Catechism sets forth once more the fundamental and essential contents of Catholic faith and morality as they are believed, celebrated, lived and prayed by the Church today. It is thus *a special means* for deepening knowledge of the inexhaustible Christian mystery, for encouraging fresh enthusiasm for prayer intimately united with the prayer of Christ and for strengthening the commitment of a consistent witness of life.

At the same time, this Catechism is given to us as *a sure point of reference* for fulfilling the mission, entrusted to us in the Sacrament of Orders, of proclaiming the "Good News" to all people *in the name of Christ and of the Church*. Thanks to it, we can put into practice in a constantly renewed way Christ's perennial command: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations... teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Mt 28:19-20).

Indeed, in this summary of the deposit of faith, we can find *an authentic and sure norm* for teaching Catholic doctrine, for catechetical activity among the Christian people, for that "new evangelization" of which today's world has such immense need.

Dear priests, our life and ministry will themselves become an eloquent catechesis for the entire community entrusted to us, provided that they are rooted in the Truth which is Christ. Then ours will not be an isolated witness, but a harmonious one, offered by people united in the same faith and sharing in the same cup. It is this sort of vital "infectiousness" that we must together aim at, in effective and affective communion, in order to carry out the ever more urgent "new evangelization".

3. Gathered on Holy Thursday in all the priestly communities of the Church throughout the world, we give thanks for the gift of Christ's priesthood which we share through the sacrament of Holy Orders. In this thanksgiving we wish to include the theme of the *Catechism*, because its contents and its usefulness are *particularly linked up with our priestly life and with the Church's pastoral ministry*.

In the journey towards the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, the Church has succeeded in producing, after the Second Vatican Council, a compendium of her teaching on faith and morality, on sacramental life and prayer. This synthesis can support our priestly ministry in various ways. It can also enlighten the apostolic awareness of our brothers and sisters who, following their Christian vocation, desire together with us to account for that hope (cf. 1 Pt 3:15) which gives us life in Jesus Christ.

The Catechism presents the "*newness of the Council*", and at the same time situates it *in the whole of Tradition*. The Catechism is so filled with the treasures found in Sacred Scripture and in the Fathers and Doctors of the Church in the course of 2,000 years that it will enable each of us to become like the man in the Gospel parable "who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old" (Mt 13:52), the ancient and ever new riches of the divine deposit.

Rekindling the grace of the Sacrament of Orders, conscious of what the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* means for our priestly ministry, we confess with worship and love the One who is "the way, and the truth, and the life" (Jn 14:6).

"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever".

From the Vatican, on 8 April, Holy Thursday, in the year 1993, the 15th of my Pontificate.

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