



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II

TO THE EX-ALUMNI

OF THE PONTIFICAL NORTH AMERICAN COLLEGE 8 January 1999 *Your Eminences,*

Your Excellencies,

Dear Friends, I am very happy to greet the alumni of the Pontifical North American College on the occasion of your Annual Reunion. I also extend a warm welcome to the Rector, faculty and students of the College, together with the student priests of the Casa Santa Maria dell'Umiltà. You have returned to Rome, where your priestly formation took place, to re-live the profound experiences which shaped your identity and nourished your spirituality as priests. Thanks to your studies in the Eternal City, you were able to encounter in a unique way the Church's living tradition and the mystery of her Catholic unity, founded upon the witness of the Apostles and guaranteed by the ministry of Peter's Successor. Today, in the face of so many disturbing tendencies to polarization and division within society, it is all the more urgent for priests to be servants and witnesses of that supernatural communion with God and others which is the very heart of our belonging to the Church. May these days of remembrance and thanksgiving strengthen your resolve to be faithful ministers of the Church and good shepherds of Christ's flock in America. The Pontifical North American College was founded at a time when Catholics were a small and largely immigrant minority in the United States. Today, thanks to the tireless work of generations of clergy, religious and laity, the Church in your country enjoys unparalleled resources for proclaiming the Gospel and for bringing the rich inheritance of the Church's moral and social teaching to the great debates which are shaping your nation's future. The great challenge now facing America's Catholics in every sector of national life and culture is to bear a united and convincing public witness to those truths about the human person and human community which are revealed by God, accessible to reason and embodied in the founding documents of your Republic. It is my hope that the College, by training intelligent, wise and holy preachers of the Gospel, will fully respond to this challenge and exercise a constructive and prophetic influence for the moral renewal of American society. Dear friends, as we approach the dawn of the Third Christian Millennium, I pray that you will be ever more faithful and zealous heralds of Jesus Christ, "the same yesterday, today and for ever" (*Heb 13:8*). Commending all of you to the loving intercession of Mary Immaculate, Patroness of your country and of the College, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of strength and peace in the Lord.