



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II FOR THE JUBILEE CELEBRATION FOR ARTISTS

Friday, 18 February 2000

*Your Eminence,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and the Priesthood,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

1. It is a great joy for me to meet you in this basilica, in which some of the greatest geniuses of architecture and sculpture have had a hand. Welcome! I greet Cardinal Roger Etchegaray, who has presided at the celebration of Holy Mass. With him I greet Archbishop Francesco Marchisano, President of the Pontifical Commission for the Cultural Heritage of the Church, and the other prelates and priests. I also greet the civil authorities who have spoken and the artists present. I express my appreciation to everyone for this intense witness of faith. No one, dear lovers of art, can feel as much at home here as you, where faith and art come together in so remarkable a way and lift us up to contemplation of the divine glory.

You have just experienced that in the Eucharistic celebration which is the heart of ecclesial life. If, as the Council said, "in the earthly liturgy we take part in a foretaste of that heavenly liturgy" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 8), it is particularly evident in the splendour of this Church. It transports us in spirit to the heavenly Jerusalem, whose foundations - according to the words of the Book of Revelation - are "adorned with every jewel" (21: 19), and the light of the sun and moon are no longer needed, "for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb" (21: 23).

2. I am pleased today to offer you once again the sentiments of esteem I expressed last year in my *Letter to Artists*. It is time to return to that *fruitful alliance between the Church and artists* which has deeply marked the path of Christianity in these two millennia. This presumes your ability, dear Christian artists, to live profoundly the reality of your Christian faith, so that it will give birth to culture and offer the world new "epiphanies" of the divine beauty reflected in creation. It is precisely to express your faith that you are here today. You have come to celebrate the Jubilee. What does this mean in the final analysis, other than *to fix one's gaze on the face of*

Christ, to receive his mercy and be bathed in his light? *The Jubilee is Christ!* He is our salvation and our joy; he is our hymn and our hope. Anyone who enters this basilica through the Holy Door first meets him when turning his eyes to Michelangelo's *Pietà*, joining his gaze in a way with Mary's as she embraces the lifeless body of her Son. That tortured yet sweet body of the "fairest of the sons of men" (*Ps 45: 3*) is the source of life. Mary, image of the new humanity, herself one of the saved, presents him to each of us as the source of resurrection. In fact, as the Apostle Paul teaches us, "we were buried with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised for the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life" (*Rom 6: 4*).

3. The Jubilee invites us to accept *this grace of resurrection* so that it will penetrate every corner of our lives, healing them not only from sin but also from the dross that sin leaves in us even after we have been reconciled with God. In a certain sense it is a question of "sculpting" the stone of our hearts to bring out the features of Christ the new Man.

The Artist who can do this in depth is the Holy Spirit. However, he requires our responsiveness and docility. Conversion of heart, so to speak, is *a work of art jointly produced by the Spirit and our freedom*. You artists, accustomed to shaping the most diverse materials according to the inspiration of your genius, know how closely the daily effort to improve one's life resembles artistic work. As I wrote in my Letter to you, "through his 'artistic creativity', man appears more than ever 'in the image of God' and he accomplishes this task above all in shaping the wondrous 'material' of his own humanity and then exercising creative dominion over the universe which surrounds him" (*Letter to Artists*, n. 1). There is a remarkable similarity between the art of forming oneself and that which takes place in the transformation of matter.

4. In both these tasks the starting-point is always *a gift from above*. If artistic creation has need of "inspiration", the journey of the spirit has need of grace, which is the gift by which God communicates himself, surrounding our lives with his love, lighting our steps and knocking at our hearts until he can dwell in them and make them the temple of his holiness: "If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him" (*Jn 14: 23*).

This dialogue with grace primarily involves the ethical level, but it touches all the dimensions of our lives and is particularly expressed in the exercise of artistic talent. God lets himself be glimpsed in your spirit through the fascination of beauty and your longing for it. Without doubt the artist has a *special relationship* to beauty, and it can be said that beauty is "the vocation bestowed on him by the Creator" (*Letter to Artists*, n. 3). If the artist can perceive a ray of the supreme beauty among the many manifestations of the beautiful, then *art becomes a way to God* and spurs the artist to combine his creative talent with his commitment to a life of ever greater conformity to the divine law. At times the encounter between the splendour of artistic achievement and the heaviness of one's heart can stir that salutary restlessness which makes one want to overcome mediocrity and to start a new life, generously open to the love of God and our brethren.

5. It is then that our humanity soars in an experience of freedom and, I would say, of the infinite, like the experience Michelangelo still inspires in us by his dome that both dominates and crowns this church. Viewed from the outside, it seems to outline the embrace of heaven over the community gathered in prayer, as if to symbolize God's love in drawing near to it. But when seen from the inside with its dizzying height, it suggests the fascination and effort required to rise to the full encounter with God.

Today's Jubilee celebration calls you, dear artists, precisely to rise in this way. It invites you to practise *the wonderful "art" of holiness*. If this should seem too difficult, may the thought that we are not alone on this journey give you comfort: grace also sustains us through that ecclesial companionship in which the Church becomes a mother to each of us, obtaining from her divine Bridegroom a superabundance of mercy and gifts. Is this not the meaning of the "*mater Ecclesia*" which Bernini powerfully depicted in the solemn embrace of the colonnade? Those majestic arms are always motherly arms reaching out to all humanity. Welcomed into them, every member of the Church can feel heartened on his pilgrim journey to our homeland.

Thus our reflection returns to its starting-point, to the splendour of the heavenly Jerusalem, for which we yearn as the pilgrim People of God.

I hope, dear artists, that you will always feel drawn by that splendour, and as a comfort to you in your efforts, I cordially give you my Blessing.

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