



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE CONVENTION
PROMOTED BY THE ITALIAN NATIONAL FEDERATION
OF THE APOSTOLIC UNION OF THE CLERGY**

Friday, 27 June 2003

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. "*Ecce quam bonum et quam jucundum habitare fratres in unum*" - "How good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!". I remembered these well-known verses of Psalm 133 while I was listening to the courteous and cordial words of Archbishop Csaba Ternyák, Secretary of the Congregation for the Clergy, who has expressed the sentiments of all those present. Yes, it is indeed a profound joy to meet and to be aware of the brotherhood that is born among us, dear priests who share in the one and eternal Priesthood of Christ. This morning you were able to experience this mystery of communion during the Eucharistic Celebration at the Altar of the Chair in St Peter's Basilica. It is now the Successor of Peter who opens to you the doors of his and your home.

I offer each of you the most fraternal greeting in the Lord. I greet in a special way the organizers and the animators of your national Convention, and all the participants. I greet those in charge of the Apostolic Union of the Clergy at the national and international levels, as well as the representatives of the newly-formed Apostolic Union of the Laity.

2. During the congress you have been reflecting on the theme: "*In the particular Church on the manner of Trinitarian Communion: Diocesan spirituality is a spirituality of communion*". In continuity with the previous meetings, you are intending to focus on the role of Pastors in the particular Church.

The mystery of Trinitarian Communion is the exalted model and reference of ecclesial communion.

I wanted to reaffirm this in my Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, recalling that "the great challenge facing us in the millennium which is now beginning" is precisely this: "to make the Church the home and the school of communion" (n. 43). This entails, in the first place, "promoting a spirituality of communion" which becomes as it were a "guiding principle of education wherever individuals and Christians are formed" (*ibid.*).

We become experts of the "spirituality of communion" above all through a radical conversion to Christ, a docile openness to the action of his Holy Spirit and a sincere acceptance of our brothers and sisters. "Let us have no illusions", I recalled in *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, "unless we follow this spiritual path, external structures of communion will serve very little purpose. They would become mechanisms without a soul, 'masks' of communion rather than its means of expresion and growth" (*ibid.*).

3. If, therefore, the effectiveness of the apostolate does not depend solely on the activity and efforts of organizations, necessary though these may be, but first of all on divine action, it is necessary to foster an intimate communion with the Lord. Today, as in the past, it is the saints who are the most effective evangelizers, and all the baptized are called to aspire to "*this high standard of ordinary Christian living*" (*ibid.*, n. 31). This is especially true for priests, who have positions and roles of great responsibility among the Christian people. The World Day of Prayer for the Sanctification of the Clergy, which by a fortunate coincidence is observed on this very day, is a favourable opportunity to beg from the Lord the gift of zealous and holy ministers for his Church.

4. To achieve this ideal of holines, every priest must follow the example of the divine Master, the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep. A saint of our time, José María Escrivá, writes that "the Lord uses us as torches, to make [his] light shine out.... Much depends on us; if we respond many people will remain in darkness no longer, but will walk instead along paths that lead to eternal life" (*The Forge*, n. 1). But where can we set light to these torches of brightness and holiness other than in the Heart of Christ, an inexhaustible furnace of love? It is not by chance that the World Day of Prayer for the Sanctification of the Clergy is celebrated precisely today, the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart.

In the heart of his Only-begotten Son, the heavenly Father has filled us with infinite treasures of mercy, tenderness and love - "*infinitos dilectionis thesauros*", as we pray in today's liturgy. In the Heart of the Redeemer "*the whole fullness of the deity dwells bodily*" (Col 2: 9), from which we can draw the indispensable spiritual energy to make his love and joy shine out in the world.

May Mary help us follow in docility Jesus, who repeats to us time and time again: "*Come to me... and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls*" (Mt 11: 29).

Dear friends, I thank you again for your visit and I bless you all with affection.

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