



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE STUDENTS OF THE ROMAN MAJOR SEMINARY
ON THE FEAST OF OUR LADY OF CONFIDENCE**

Saturday, 1 March 2003

1. This year our traditional celebration of the Feast of Our Lady of Confidence, which the whole spiritual family of the Roman Major Seminary feels and shares so deeply, takes place in the Paul VI Audience Hall at the Vatican. Dear brothers and sisters, I welcome each of you!

I first greet the Cardinal Vicar and Mons. Pietro Fragnelli, who have expressed your common sentiments. As I thank them for their kind words, I want to congratulate Mons. Fragnelli on his recent appointment as Bishop of Castellaneta, assuring him of a special remembrance in prayer for his new ecclesial mission. At the same time, I greet the new Rector, Mons. Giovanni Tani, and wish him a fruitful ministry in the seminary and at the service of vocations.

I also greet the alumni, the Bishops, the priests and you, young people of Rome who have wished to take part in this intense moment of reflection and fraternal sharing. With special affection I embrace you, dear seminarians, those who really celebrate the feast today. I am glad that along with the students of the Roman Seminary, students from the *Redemptoris Mater* Seminary, from the Seminary of Our Lady of Divine Love and some from the Capranica are also here this evening.

2. I have been moved as we followed the oratorio composed by the beloved maestro, Mons. Marco Frisina; it was inspired by the human life and message of Sr Faustina Kowalska, a privileged witness of Divine Mercy. The love of Christ heals the wounds of the human heart and, through grace, communicates to the human person the very life of God.

The title of the musical composition we have just been able to enjoy in the beautiful performance

by the seminarians and the diocesan choir, presents the invocation that is famous throughout the world: *Jezu, ufam tobie - Jesus, I trust in you!*

This act of confidence and abandonment to God's love is simple but profound. It is a basic point of strength for the human being, because it can transform life. In the inevitable trials and difficulties of life, in moments of joy and enthusiasm, entrusting ourselves to the Lord fills the soul with peace, induces us to recognize the primacy of the divine initiative and opens our spirit to humility and truth.

Jesus, I trust in you! Jezu, ufam tobie! Thousands and thousands of devotees in every corner of the earth repeat this simple and eloquent invocation!

In the heart of Jesus whoever is in anguish on account of the crosses of life can find peace; those afflicted by suffering and illness obtain relief; those in the grip of uncertainty and anxiety experience joy, because in Christ's heart are depths of consolation and love for all who turn to Him with confidence.

3. I know that during your days of preparation for today's Feast of Our Lady of Confidence, you have many times been drawn to reflect on the need to trust in Jesus in every circumstance. Here is a fruitful journey of faith, which we are asked to make sustained by Mary, Mother of Divine Mercy.

In this regard, Mary's words to the servants at the wedding feast in Cana resound in our spirit: "*Do whatever he tells you*" (Jn 2,5), words that encourage us to trust in Christ. It is precisely to Him that the Blessed Virgin, Our Lady of Confidence, guides us.

In my recent Apostolic Letter *On the Holy Rosary*, I wanted to reaffirm how important it is to let oneself be led by this extraordinary Teacher of the spiritual life who devoted herself with untiring contemplation of the face of Christ, her Son. Hers is a penetrating gaze, "one capable of deeply understanding Jesus, even to the point of perceiving his hidden feelings and anticipating his decisions, as at Cana (cf. Jn 2,5)" (n. 10). With Jesus, Mary shared joys, apprehensions, expectations and sufferings even to the supreme sacrifice of the Cross; she then shared with Him in the joy of the Resurrection and, praying with the Apostles in the Upper Room, awaited the descent of the Holy Spirit.

4. Dear young people! Let yourselves be guided by Mary who, in the Roman Seminary, the heart of our diocese, is venerated with the beautiful title of "Our Lady of Confidence". At her school you will learn the sublime art of entrusting yourselves to God. If you follow Mary, as did St Faustina Kowalska, Sr Faustina, you will be able to do God's will and be ready to serve the cause of the Gospel generously. You will also be able to travel the road that leads to holiness, the vocation of every Christian. In this way you will be faithful disciples of Christ.

This is my wish for you, dear young friends, and this is what I pray for as I cordially bless you, your directors of formation, your families and those who support the activity of the Roman seminary and the pastoral care of vocations of the Diocese of Rome.

Before ending this address, I would like once again to return to my own seminary. It was a "clandestine" seminary. During the war, with the Nazi occupation of Poland and of Kraków, all the seminaries were closed. Cardinal Sapieha, my Bishop of Kraków, organized a "clandestine" seminary and I belonged to that "clandestine" seminary, one could say, "catacombal". Above all, my experience is connected with that seminary. Especially since today we remembered Sr Faustina. Sr Faustina lived and is now buried close to Kraków, in a place called Łagiewniki. Beside Łagiewniki was the chemical factory of Solvay where I was a worker during the four years of the war and Nazi occupation. At that time, I would never have imagined that one day, as Bishop of Rome, I would be speaking of that experience to the Roman seminarians.

That experience as a worker and a "clandestine" seminarian has stayed with me all my life. I used to take books with me to the factory during my eight-hour shift, during the day or at night. My workmates were rather surprised, but not scandalized. Indeed, they said, "We will help you, you can rest and in your place we will keep an eye [on the boilers] instead of you". So I was also able to do the exams with my professors. Everything was done clandestinely: philosophy, metaphysics.... I studied metaphysics personally and tried to understand its "categories". And I did understand. Even without the help of my professors, I understood. As well as passing the exam, I was able to realize that metaphysics and Christian philosophy gave me a new vision of the world, a deeper perception of reality. Up to then, I had only done humanistic studies linked to literature and letters. Through metaphysics and philosophy, I found a key, the key to an understanding and perception of the world. A much deeper, I might even say, ultimate perception.

There would be other things to recall, but unfortunately it is not possible to go on too long.

However, I wanted to say this. While the oratorio was being played this thought occurred to me: "You, who were a 'clandestine' seminarian must tell the Roman seminarians about those days and about your experience". I thank the Lord who gave me that extraordinary experience and who has enabled me to speak of my experience as a "clandestine" seminarian, "catacombal", to the seminarians of Rome more than 50 years later. And I think that this is also a beautiful tribute to Our Lady of Confidence for we also lived through all those "clandestine" years, thanks to that confidence, confidence in God and in his Mother. I learned confidence in the Blessed Virgin Mary who is the Patroness of your seminary. I learned to have confidence above all during the terrible years of the war and in the clandestine life. Thank you.