



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO SUPERIORS AND STUDENTS
OF THE ALMO COLLEGIO CAPRANICA**

*Clementine Hall
Saturday, 19 January 2008*

Your Eminence,

Dear Superiors and Students of the Almo Collegio Capranica,

This year, I again have the pleasure of meeting you on the occasion of the Feast of St Agnes, your heavenly Patronness. I offer each one of you my most cordial greeting. First of all, I greet Cardinal Camillo Ruini and thank him for his courteous expressions interpreting your sentiments. I greet the Rector and those who assist him in the direction of the community; I address a special greeting to you, dear students, and to everyone present, as I also extend my thoughts to the alumnae of the Capranica, who exercise their ministry at the service of the Church and souls in various parts of the world.

After celebrating its 550th anniversary in 2007, the *Almo Collegio*, which boasts an age-old history and a long tradition of fidelity to the Church and to her supreme Pastor, will commemorate in August the actual anniversary of the death of Cardinal Domenico Capranica (14 August 1458), who did a great deal for the birth of the *Collegium pauperum scholarium*, destined for the formation of well-trained men for the priestly ministry. In approaching this anniversary, I gladly remember the exemplary and far-sighted figure of this Cardinal, who with determination and a practical sense knew how to support the desire for reform that was also beginning to make itself felt in Rome, and, a century later, was to contribute to determining the orientation and decisions of the Council of Trent. He had the gift of clearly intuiting that the hoped-for reform was not solely to concern ecclesiastical structures, but mainly the life and decisions of those in the Church who were called to be guides and pastors of the People of God at any level.

Convinced of the importance of the spiritual dimension in the formation of future ministers of the altar and in the Church's mission, Cardinal Capranica not only did his utmost to establish the College, but he also desired to endow it with *Constitutiones* that fully regulate the various aspects the young students' formation. Thus, he showed his attention to the primacy of the spiritual dimension as well as his awareness that the depth and consequent perseverance of a sound priestly formation crucially depend on a complete and organic educational programme. These decisions have even greater prominence today, given the many challenges that priests and evangelizers must face in their mission. In this regard, on various occasions I have reminded seminarians and priests to cultivate a profound inner life, personal and constant contact with Christ in prayer and contemplation, and a sincere longing for holiness. Indeed, without true friendship with Jesus, it is impossible for a Christian, especially a priest, to fulfil the mission the Lord entrusts to him. For the priest, this certainly also entails a serious cultural and theological training which you, dear students, are acquiring during these years of study in Rome.

Actually, I would say that your formation process can receive a decisive impulse precisely from your stay in this City. The levels of experience and the contacts that it is possible to have here are in fact a providential gift and a unique incentive. The presence of the Chair of Peter, the work of the people and organizations that help the Bishop of Rome to preside in charity, a more direct knowledge of certain particular churches, especially the Diocese of Rome, are important elements that help a young man called to the priesthood to prepare himself for his future ministry. Moreover, your Pastors have sent you to the City of the Successor of Peter in the hope that you will return later enriched by a pronounced Catholic spirit and with a fuller ecclesial sensibility of universal breadth. The experience of communal life at the Capranica College among students from various regions of Italy and from countries of the whole world, enables each one of you, dear friends, to be thoroughly acquainted with the interweaving of cultures and mentalities that is typical of contemporary life. Furthermore, the presence of several who belong to the Russian Orthodox Church gives a further impetus to dialogue and brotherhood and nourishes ecumenical hope.

Dear students, make the most of the possibilities that Providence offers you during these years of your stay in Rome. Above all, foster an intimate relationship with the Immaculate Lamb, imitating St Agnes who followed him faithfully even to the point of sacrificing her life. Thanks to the intercession of this holy Virgin and Martyr, and above all to constant recourse to the motherly protection of Mary *Virgo Sapiens*, may the Lord help you to prepare yourselves with constant care for future ministry. As I thank you once again for your visit, I willingly impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you who are here and to your loved ones.