



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Wednesday, 30 June 2004

1. Yesterday we celebrated the Solemnity of the Apostles Peter and Paul, venerated in a special way here in Rome, where both of them sealed with blood their wonderful witness of love for the Lord. This year, the solemn Eucharistic Liturgy was enriched by the fraternal participation of His Holiness, the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the historic encounter in Jerusalem between my venerable Predecessor, the Servant of God Paul VI, and the Ecumenical Patriarch, Athenagoras.

Your presence also was important, dear *Metropolitan Archbishops*, appointed in the past year. I have had the joy of conferring the sacred Pallium upon you, and today I am meeting you again. I greet you with deep affection, together with your relatives and friends, and I extend my thoughts to the communities entrusted to your pastoral care.

2. Your appreciated presence gives me the opportunity to reflect on the meaning of the ancient custom of the conferral of Palliums.

Since the ninth century, the Archbishops appointed to Metropolitan Sees have received from the Pope a special *liturgical emblem* - the "*Pallium*" - as an attestation of communion with the Bishop of Rome. This emblem, which the Supreme Pontiff wears for all solemn celebrations and Metropolitans, on special occasions, consists of a narrow stole of white wool that is worn round the neck. Every year as many Palliums are made as there are new Metropolitan Archbishops. The Pope blesses them at the First Vespers on the Solemnity of Sts Peter and Paul. They are then placed in a special urn enclosed in a cabinet under the Altar of the "Confessio" in the Vatican Basilica, at the Apostle's tomb, and are conferred upon the Archbishops the following day.

3. Still today, the sign of the Pallium preserves its unique eloquence. It expresses *the fundamental principle of communion* which gives every aspect of ecclesial life its shape; it recalls that this communion is *organic and hierarchical*; it shows that the Church, in order to be one, is in need of the special service of the *Church of Rome* and of *her Bishop*, Head of the Episcopal College (cf. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Gregis*, n. 56).

The other complementary aspect that the rite of the Pallium brings out clearly is the *catholicity of the Church*. Indeed, she was sent by Christ to proclaim the Gospel to all the nations and to serve all humanity.

4. Dear brothers and sisters, many of you have wanted to be with these Prelates on such an important occasion. They are your Pastors! I ask you to stay united to them and to pray for the *pastoral mission* that they are called to fulfil. My thoughts also go to the eight Metropolitans who are not present here and who will receive the Pallium at home.

Just as Christ once said to Peter, so to everyone he repeats: *Duc in altum!* He invites us to put out into the deep and to venture undaunted into the sea of life, trusting in the constant support of Mary, Mother of God, and in the intercession of the Apostles Peter and Paul, who with their blood made the early Church fertile.

To special groups

I offer a warm welcome to all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors present at today's Audience. I greet particularly the groups from Ireland, Scotland, Taiwan, Canada, Japan and the United States of America. I thank the choirs for their praise of God in song. My greeting goes especially to the numerous visitors who have come with their respective Metropolitan Archbishop for the reception of the Pallium. Upon all of you I cordially invoke joy and peace in our Lord Jesus Christ. Thank you and have a pleasant stay in Rome!

I address a special greeting to the Italian-speaking pilgrims. In particular, I greet the Metropolitan Archbishops who received the Pallium: Archbishop Carlo Caffarra of Bologna, Archbishop Edoardo Menichelli of Ancona, Archbishop Pietro Coccia of Pesaro.

I then greet the representatives of the Italian National Coordination of the Villages of St Vitus who have come here in such large numbers with Bishop Francesco Micciché of Trapani, with their parish priests and their mayors, in memory of their Patron Saint.

I also greet the *Piccole Apostole della Redenzione*, who are celebrating their General Chapter in these days. Dear friends, I wish you fresh enthusiasm in your dedication to your mission.

I likewise greet those taking part in the pilgrimage in honour of *Our Lady of Health*, who come in

particular from Stradella, Sartirana and Pieve del Cairo. I thank you for your participation, and invoke the protection of the Blessed Virgin upon you.

Lastly, my thoughts go to the *young people*, the *sick* and the *newly-weds*.

Subsequent to the Solemnity of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul is the liturgical commemoration today of the First Martyrs of the Church of Rome. Dear friends, imitate their Gospel witness and be faithful to Christ in every situation of life.