



The Holy See

OPENING OF THE ACADEMIC YEAR OF ECCLESIASTICAL UNIVERSITIES

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Friday 20 October 2000

1. "... for the praise of his glory" (Eph 1: 11, 14).

St Paul's words, which we heard a few moments ago, offer us the perspective and meaning of this celebration that opens the academic year of the Roman ecclesiastical universities. From the beginning, *we have wanted to offer everything to God and to direct it to his glory*: our teaching, our studies, our community life, our work and leisure time; and even more, our personal life, prayer, asceticism and friendship. This evening we would like to place our whole being and all our work on the altar of the Lord, in order to offer it as a spiritual sacrifice "for the praise of his glory".

I extend my cordial greeting to you all, dear brothers and sisters, who have gathered here for this traditional celebration, starting with Archbishop Zenon Grocholewski, Prefect of the Congregation for Catholic Education, who is presiding at this Eucharist. With him I greet the university rectors, the members of the academic staff, and the superiors of the seminaries and colleges where you, students, find hospitality and help during your time of formation.

I extend a special welcome to the first-year students who are beginning their studies this year at Rome's pontifical universities and institutes. I would like everyone to know that the opportunity to complete one's studies in Rome is a gift and, at the same time, to realize the responsibility connected with this privilege: for you are called to deepen your formation *for the sake of well-trained service to the Church*. This is why Christian Rome welcomes you with its cultural institutions, well aware of its universal vocation founded on the witness of the Apostles and martyrs.

2. "*Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, / the people whom he has chosen as his heritage*" (Ps 32 [33]: 12). How can we not see *the Church as this special "nation"* whose God is the Lord? She is the people "made one by the unity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit", according to St Cyprian's well-known expression (*De Orat. Dom.*, 23: PL 4, 553).

Dear friends, you come from different nations of the world. In this basilica, your faces form a wonderful "mosaic" in which differences are called to blend with one another to make a structure that *receives its form from the one Spirit of Christ*. "In him you also", St Paul says, "who have heard the word of truth, the Gospel of your salvation, and have believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit" (*Eph 1: 13*).

At the beginning of a new academic year, it is important for each of you to return to your roots and, through them, to Christ, in whom these differences are harmonized, *leading us to be one*. It is a beautiful thing to recognize and profess our being Church, "the nation whose God is the Lord", the people he chose from among all the peoples, so that it might be in the world a "sacrament" as it were of the unity of the human race. *Never lose this profound sense of the mystery of the Church to which you belong!* It is the Church, in fact, which is the vital context of authentic Christian formation; in communion with her, you intend to pursue your commitment to study.

3. "*Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy*" (*Lk 12: 1*). In the Gospel passage proclaimed a few moments ago, Jesus puts his disciples on guard against hypocritical attitudes, thus deceiving themselves that they can hide evil things behind apparent honesty. The Lord reminds us that everything is destined to come to light, even what is hidden and secret. In addition, he urges his followers, whom he calls "friends", not to fear anything or anyone, but only God, in whose hands is our life. If the invitation to fear "him who, after he has killed, has power to cast into hell" (*Lk 12: 4*) causes a salutary shiver, it is immediately followed by the comforting description of God who cares for every creature, especially human beings, who are most precious in his eyes.

The theme of the absolute transparency of everything and of everyone before God unites the two parts of today's Gospel passage. It is an essential element of that filial relationship with God which Christ preached, thus fulfilling the revelation of the Old Covenant.

As it was for Jesus, this is really your priority task as well, dear teachers and students of the ecclesiastical universities: *to know and to make known the true image of God*. "That they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (*Jn 17: 3*): for human beings, eternal life consists in this, and for this reason the Son of God came into the world, so that they "may have life, and have it abundantly" (*Jn 10: 10*).

At the beginning of a new year of theological or other ecclesiastical studies, this passage from Luke's Gospel helps us to make explicit the fundamental reference to Christ's mission and the meaning of his Incarnation: here the mission that each of you has, in the diversity of your charisms and ministries, receives light and strength.

4. Dear brothers and sisters! Today I would like to repeat the words of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council in the Declaration *Gravissimum educationis*: "The Church anticipates great benefits from the activities of the faculties of the sacred sciences" (n. 11). In truth, she counts very much on the work that is daily accomplished in each of the pontifical universities. As Bishop of Rome, I would particularly like to express my *appreciation and gratitude* for the work of the superiors, teachers and those responsible for Rome's ecclesiastical institutions. Your enterprise, dear friends, together with the high level of scholarship and sure fidelity to the Magisterium, shows your love for Christ and his Church and, I would say, the authentic missionary spirit in which you serve the Truth.

On the eve of World Mission Sunday, I would like to stress that the work of those who teach and study at the ecclesiastical faculties is not separate from, much less in opposition to, the work of those "in the front lines" as it were. We are all at the service of Truth, which is the Gospel of Christ our Lord. The Gospel, by its nature, seeks to be proclaimed, but *the proclamation presupposes a solid and deep knowledge of the message*, so that evangelization will be an effective service to God, to Truth and to man.

Dear friends, may the Mother of the Redeemer, *Seat of Wisdom*, watch over you and the demands of this academic year which is just beginning. Mary is an image and model of the Church in accepting the divine Word, lovingly cherishing it, putting it into practice and bringing it to the world. May her motherly assistance be for each of you a source of renewed motivation and constant support in your work, so that all your activities may always find their origin and fulfilment in God "for the praise of his glory".

Amen!

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