



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II TO THE SACRED COLLEGE OF CARDINALS

Consistory Hall

Wednesday, 18 October 1978

Revered Brothers What can I say, what do I wish to say to you, at this meeting while all of us are certainly still moved by the ecclesial events of these days? In the first place I thank the Cardinal Dean for the noble words which, interpreting your sentiments, he has addressed to me. And in particular I express gratitude for the act of extraordinary confidence which you have shown with regard to my humble person, electing me as Peter's Successor in the See of Rome. Only in the light of faith is it possible to accept with interior tranquillity and with confidence the fact that by virtue of your choice it has fallen to me to become the Vicar of Christ on earth and visible Head of the Church. Venerable Brothers, it was an act of confidence and at the same time of great courage to have wished to call a "non-Italian" as Bishop of Rome. One cannot say any more, but can only bow one's head before this decision of the Sacred College. Never, perhaps, as in these recent events, which have involved the Church, depriving her twice in two months of her universal Pastor, has the Christian people felt and experienced the importance, the delicacy, the responsibility of the tasks that the Sacred College of Cardinals had to perform. And never as in this period—we must recognize with real satisfaction—have the faithful shown such affectionate esteem and such benevolent understanding for Their Eminences. The intense and prolonged applause addressed to you at the end of the Mass "Pro eligendo Papa" and at the announcement of the election of the new Pontiff, was the most expressive, exalting and moving proof. The faithful have really understood, *revered Brothers*, that the purple you wear is the sign of that faithfulness "unto the shedding of your blood", which you promised the Pope with a solemn oath. Yours is a garment of blood, which recalls and presents the blood that the Apostles, the Bishops, the Cardinals have shed for Christ in the course of the centuries. I remember, at this moment, the figure of a great Bishop, St John Fisher, created cardinal—as is known—when he was imprisoned for his faithfulness to the Pope of Rome. On the morning of 22 June 1535, while he was preparing to offer his head to the executioner's axe, he exclaimed facing the crowd: "Christian people, I am about to die for faith in the Holy Catholic Church of Christ". I would also venture to add that also in our times there are persons who have not been spared, who are still not spared, the experience of prison, sufferings, humiliation for Christ. May this unshakeable faithfulness to the Bride of Jesus be always the badge of honour and the pre-eminent boast of the College of Cardinals. I would like to stress another element in this short meeting of ours: the sense of brotherhood, which in this recent period has been manifested and strengthened more and more within the

Sacred College: "Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!" (Psalm 132 (133):1). The Sacred College has had to deal twice, and in a very short space of time, with one of the most delicate problems of the Church: that of the election of the Roman Pontiff. And on this occasion the true universality of the Church has shone forth. It was really possible to see what St Augustine affirms: "The Church itself speaks the languages of all peoples... Spread among the peoples, the Church speaks all languages" (St. Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, 32.7; *PL* 35, 1645). Ecclesial experiences, needs and problems that are complex, varied, and sometimes even different. But this variety has been—and certainly will be—always concordant in one faith, as the same Bishop of Hippo reminds us when he emphasizes the beauty and variety of the clothes of the queen-Church: "These languages constitute the variety of the vesture of the queen. Just as every variety of dress is harmonized in unity, so, too, all languages in regard to the one faith" (St. Augustine, *Expositions on the Psalms*, Ps. XLIV, 23: *PL* 36, 509). It is difficult for me not to express deep gratitude to the Holy Father Paul VI for the fact that he decided to give the Sacred College such a wide, international, intercontinental dimension. Its members, in fact, come from the furthest ends of the earth. That makes it possible not only to accentuate the universality of the Church, but also the universal aspect of Rome. In a few days you will all return to your posts of responsibility: most of you to your dioceses: others to the Departments of the Holy See; all to continue with ever increasing commitment the pastoral ministry, which is weighted down with responsibilities, worries and sacrifices, but also comforted by the grace of the Lord and by the spiritual joy he gives his faithful servants. But, though at the head of the particular Churches, always participate in concern for the whole Church, living and putting into practice with all your might what the Second Vatican Council recommends: "As lawful successors of the apostles and as members of the episcopal college, bishops should always realize that they are linked one to the other, and should show concern for all the churches. For by divine institution and the requirement of their apostolic office, each one in concert with his fellow bishops is responsible for the Church" (*Christus Dominus*, 6; cf. *ibid.*, 3; *Lumen Gentium*, 23). Invoking on you all, on the faithful entrusted to your pastoral zeal and on all dear to you, the grace of Christ and the watchful protection of Mary, "Mother of the Church", I would like to impart my Apostolic Blessing with great affection. I would like to do so first for you, and afterwards with you all: in this way let the Church be blessed everywhere by the new Bishop of Rome and by the whole College of Cardinals, whose members come from all over the world and are close to him.