



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE SACRED COLLEGE OF CARDINALS,
THE PONTIFICAL HOUSEHOLD, THE CURIA
AND THE ROMAN PRELATURE FOR CHRISTMAS***

Friday, 22 December 1978

Dearest Brothers of the Sacred College and Sons of the Roman Church!

1. To that address which has just now been delivered to me, in the name of all of you here present, I can only reply with the very briefest expression, but one animated by great affection: my deepest thanks. Thank you, because your visit, on this vigil of the holy feast of Christmas is not a mere gesture of protocol, taking its inspiration from a traditional custom, however gracious. But it is an act so rich in warmth of sentiment that it affords me yet a further proof, if there were any need for such—and there is not—of the fact that although I have been elected Pope scarcely two months now, and have left behind my beloved land of Poland and my own diocese of Krakow, I have received in exchange another land here in Rome and a Church as vast as the world.

Christmas is the feast of home and family affections. It is a return to the side of the infant Jesus, come to be our brother, a return to our own birth and, by an interior journey, to the primordial roots of our very existence, surrounded by the dear faces of our parents, our relatives our fellow countrymen. Christmas is an invitation, therefore, to think over our own birth, in the concrete circumstances peculiar to each one of us. Just as it is natural for me to return in thought, on a wave of colourful memories, to my home in Wadowice, so it is natural for each of you to return to the warmth of hearth and home.

But now your devoted and solicitous presence this morning comes to weave itself into my personal and private thoughts, unleashing, as it were, an irrepressible emotion, and bringing me back to another and much higher reality. I mean the new reality that has devolved upon me by the choice that precisely you, Lords Cardinals, together with your other confreres scattered throughout the

world, made on that fateful day for me, October 16. *Vos estis corona mea*, (You are my crown) I can repeat to you with the Apostle (cf. Phil 4: 11): you have extended my family circle and have become by a very special title "my kinsmen" according to that transcendent, and yet very real communion, which creates bonds as staunch as those of any human family, that communion which is called and is ecclesial life.

So I thank you, therefore, for this choral offering of best wishes, which you do not offer me on your own but together with all those whom you represent. And I reciprocate, with all my heart, wishing for each of you, as well as for all those closest to you, an abundant outpouring of heavenly grace and of that very human kindness of our Saviour, Jesus Christ (cf. Tit. 2:11).

2. I know well how my Predecessor, Paul VI, of happy memory, during the course of similar gatherings taking place in this hall during the exacting and distinguished span of his fifteen-year pontificate, always preferred to widen the horizon to include the duties of his pastoral mission. He used to recall the salient facts of the Church and the world, not only to give precise content to this talk with his most qualified Collaborators, but also to bring specific focus to the situation by a careful examination of the most recent events.

Such an opportunity also presents itself to me today in a form both similar and diverse, but perhaps somewhat easier ... What happened this year? Or, more exactly: what happened after sunset on August 6, when that remarkable Pontiff closed his eyes on the scenes of this world to open them in the light of heaven, where he entered to receive the prize of the good and faithful servant (cf. Mt 25:2)? The events are well-known and it is certainly not necessary to recall them, even less so in your presence, since you were not merely spectators, but active participants and, in great measure, protagonists, None of us—I might say with the disciple of Emmaus—is so much a stranger in Rome as to be ignorant of *quae facta sunt in illa his diebus*. (what events have taken place here in these days) (cf. Lk 24:8).

In journalistic or bureaucratic terms, there has been talk of "avvicendamento" (change), or even of a twofold "change" at the summit of the Church, so that within one year—as has been noted—we have had three Popes! This is objectively true but it certainly does not exhaust the discussion of what happened in the succession to the Apostolic See and of what is most substantial and determinant in this: I mean the formidable heritage of the very ministry of Peter, which manifested itself in the short span of these crucial years during the Pontificate of Paul VI, and which at the same time was enriched by the seed and sap, the renewing impulses, and the programmatic orientations of the Conciliar sessions.

And one ought to add too that the brief, but very intense, service of Pope John Paul I has marked this already complex heritage, bringing to it a more definite pastoral connotation. Thus, I myself, who have been called to take it up, feel day by day the truly enormous weight of such a great responsibility.

So, should we then be speaking of summits or power? Oh no, my Brothers; the service of Peter—as I intimated in the Sistine Chapel the day after my election—is essentially a task of self-giving and love. This is how I mean my humble ministry to be.

In this, I take comfort, especially, in the certitude, or even more, in the indestructible faith in the power of Jesus the Lord, who has promised to his Church an indefectible assistance (cf. Mt 28:20) and to his Vicar, even more so than to all the other Pastors, he whispers persuasively: *Modicae fideim, quare dubitasti?* (You of little faith, why did you doubt?) (Mt 14:31). But I also take comfort in the help that you offer me, of which I have had daily confirmation, even during this first period of pontifical beginnings, in many ways and with much efficiency... So here I take up again the theme of best wishes to you, concluding with a renewed invitation to raise up your prayers for me. Let fellowship in prayer and charity take highest priority among the forms of your precious collaboration with me.

3. After a look at the Church, one's thoughts turn quite naturally—as also Pope Paul's used to turn—to the world that surrounds it. How has human society fared during this year which has just come to an end? And how is it faring just now? We all need to look at the facts, and even more at the connections between them, in order to grasp—as far as possible—their sense and direction. Here we might ask, for example, is the cause of peace among men progressing or stagnating? And the answer comes back anxious and uncertain, when we discover, in different countries, the persistence of virulent tensions, which frequently give rise to furious outbreaks of violence.

Peace, unfortunately, remains rather precarious, while it is all too easy to catch a glimpse of the fundamental motives which are ready to threaten it. Where there is no justice—who doesn't know this—there can be no peace, because injustice is itself a disorder, and the words of the prophet remain ever true: *Opus iustitiae pax* (The work of justice is peace) (Is 32:17). Likewise, where there is no respect for human rights—I mean those inalienable rights which are inherent in every man by his very nature—there can be no peace, because every violation of personal dignity favours rancour and the spirit of revenge. Moreover, where there is no moral formation to favour the growth of good, there can be no peace, because it is always necessary to keep watch and contain the destructive tendencies which nestle in the heart of man.

I do not want to linger on these thoughts, my Brothers, but I want to extract from all this a certain indicative point. Studying this theme, it seems even more necessary to consolidate the spiritual bases of peace, continuing with courage and with perseverance that *pedagogy of peace* of which Paul VI was such an authoritative master. In the Message for the World Day of Peace, published just yesterday, I took up his exposition on education for peace, and I repeat to you—as to all men, who are my Brothers—the invitation to deepen this theme and assimilate it.

Just how urgent the need is to pledge oneself to the cause of peace has been confirmed by the sad news coming recently from the Continent of South America.

The dispute which has grown ever more aggravated in these recent days between Argentina and Chile, notwithstanding the lively appeal for peace sent to the Authorities on the part of the Bishops of the two Countries, vigorously supported by my Predecessor, Pope John Paul I, is a cause for deep sorrow and personal anxiety.

Moved by the paternal affection that I bear to both of these dear nations, I, myself, on the vigil of the meeting scheduled for 12 December in Buenos Aires between their Ministers of Foreign Affairs and upon which so many hopes had rested, manifested directly to the two Presidents my own fears, my prayers, and my encouragement in seeking through calm and responsible examination a way of safeguarding that peace so ardently desired by both peoples.

The answers I received are full of respect and expressions of good will. Yet, notwithstanding the acceptance in principle, on the part of both contenders, of recourse to the mediating intervention of this Holy See, in the concrete difficulties then at issue, the common proposal has not been acted upon. The Holy See would not have refused such an appeal, even in the knowledge of the delicacy and complexity of the question, considering the higher interests of peace as prevailing over the political and technical aspects of the quarrel.

Yesterday, when faced with the ever more alarming news arriving here about the aggravated circumstances and what some consider the possibly imminent precipitation of the situation, I made known to the Parties concerned my disposition—indeed, my desire—to send to the two Capitals my own special representative, in order to have more direct and concrete information about the respective positions, and in order to examine and search together for the possibilities of an honourable and peaceful settlement of the question.

In the evening came the news of the acceptance of such a proposal on the part of both of the Governments, with expressions of gratitude and confidence which, while they comfort me, make me feel even more the responsibility that such an intervention involves, but from which the Holy See is determined not to allow herself to shrink. Thus, since both of the Parties jointly emphasize the urgency of such an intervention, the Holy See will proceed with all possible solicitude.

Meanwhile, I wish to renew my sorrowful appeal to the Authorities, that any steps be avoided which could bear unforeseen consequences—or even all too foreseeable ones—of harm and suffering for the populations of the two brother nations. Thus, I invite all to lift up a fervent prayer to the Lord that the violence of arms may not have the advantage over peace.

4. And now I want to give you some good news as a sort of happy first-fruits of initiatives and events, different among themselves, but all demonstrative of the multiform presence and activity of Holy Church.

a) The first news is that, towards the end of next January, I hope to go—please God—to Mexico in

order to participate at the *Third General Assembly of the Latin American Episcopate*, which is to take place—as you know—at Puebla de los Angeles. This is an event of the most relevant ecclesial importance, not only because in the vast Continent of Latin America, called the Continent of Hope, the Catholic faithful are present as the clear majority. But it is so also by reason of that special interest, and even more, those great expectations which are focused upon that meeting, and which it will be the authentic historical credit of the Bishops who govern those ancient and new Churches to transform into comforting reality. But, before going to the seat of the Conference, I shall make a stop at the celebrated Sanctuary of Our Lady of Guadalupe. It is there, in fact, that I wish to draw that higher solace and necessary stimulus—the good auspices, as it were—for my mission as the Pastor of the Church, and especially for my first contact with the Church of Latin America. The essential point of a most ardently desired encounter with this Church will be precisely such a religious pilgrimage to the feet of the Holy Virgin, in order to venerate her, to implore her help, and to ask her for inspiration and counsel for my Brothers from the entire Continent.

It is a joy for me to affirm all this on the vigil of Christmas, the moment when all—Pastors and faithful—are reunited around the Mother who, as she once gave to the world the Saviour Jesus in the stable at Bethlehem, still gives him to us in the inexhaustible fruitfulness of her virginal and spiritual maternity. I pray that my presence in her beautiful sanctuary on Mexican soil may contribute to our finding Christ again through her—through her as Mother, not only for the people of that same land, but for all the Nations of Latin America.

As far as the theme assigned to the meeting at Puebla is concerned, you are already familiar with it, together with the wise advice contained in the preparatory document, set forth by CELAM: "Evangelization in the present and in the future of Latin America." Well then, the relevance of this theme, its theological, ecclesiological, pastoral, doctrinal, and practical implications, the very amplitude of the area in which it will be necessary to apply each concrete resolution, are so very evident that I do not need to explain the reason for my decision. As Paul VI wished to be present at the second Assembly, during the International Eucharistic Congress of Bogotá, so I shall be present among the brothers convened there for the new Assembly with the aim of witnessing to them and to their priests and faithful the esteem, the confidence, the hope of the universal Church, and to increase their courage in the common pastoral task. Someone has said that the future of the Church "is being played out" in Latin America. Even if, on a general plane, this future is hidden in God, according to his design that goes beyond the projects of men and socio-historical conditions (cf. Rom 11:33; Acts 16:6-9), this sentence contains a truth of its own, because it signifies how much the fate of the Church of the Central and South American Continent is in solidarity with that of the one and undivided Church of Christ.

So, for now, I send out my very best wishes to that select assembly.

b) The second announcement refers to the decision to open to scholars the Secret Vatican

Archives to include the whole Pontificate of Pope Leo XIII. Such a decision, awaited some time now by the world of culture, falls opportunely in the year 1978, which marks—as you well know—a double centenary: that of the death of the servant of God, Pius IX, and that of the successive elevation to the Chair of Peter of Gioacchino Pecci, whose ministry, which lasted fully twenty-five years, "usque ad summam senectutem" (unto exceeding old age), carried over into the first years of our own century. So it is that the Holy See, consenting to the free perusal of the letters and documents concerning this ample and hardly unimportant period, running from 1878 to 1903, which marks the entry into the twentieth century, opens to investigation a panorama of singular richness in the service of historical truth, witnessing, also to the ever active presence of the Church in the world of culture.

c) Much along the same lines of thought is the plan to honour the memory of my great Predecessor, Paul VI. On the one hand, to his perpetual memory, the great Audience Hall, desired by him and entrusted to the ingenious skill of the Architect, Pier Luigi Nervi, will from now on be called "Aula Paolo VI" (Hall of Paul VI). On the other hand, in order to treasure the patrimony that came about during the last year of his Pontificate, the "autographs" (handwritten letters) of so many famous persons, which were offered to him during the course of his eightieth birthday, will be made available to the public. I consider, in fact, that one of my most specific duties is to continue and develop the interest that Paul VI constantly demonstrated in the cause of culture and art: this earned for him so much respect and brought such great prestige to the Church.

Thus, Brothers and dear Sons, I have replied to your well-wishing; I have officially anticipated here certain plans; I have recommended myself to your prayers and to the prayers of all. The contacts I have had until now with you urge me to make clear the meaning of this communion. I thank God that I have already been able to become acquainted personally with one sector of my closest collaborators, those of the Secretariat of State, and I have every intention of continuing, as soon as I possibly can, the visits to the other departments of the Roman Curia, in the conviction that reciprocal acquaintance favours the best coordination of our forces tending—according to the respective functions of each—to the same focal centre of reference: the growth of the People of God in faith and charity.

So, here we are at Christmas, and Jesus is coming. May he find us all—as the Preface of Advent augurs—vigilant in our expectation, exulting in our praise, ardent in our charity, under the gently reassuring gaze of her who, as Mother of Jesus, was and is also Our Mother. May it be so, with my warmest blessing.

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