



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PILGRIMS
FROM THE DIOCESE OF VIGEVANO***

Saturday, 17 April 1999

Dear Brothers and Sisters of the Diocese of Vigevano,

1. My most cordial greetings to each of you. I affectionately greet your zealous Pastor, Bishop Giovanni Locatelli, whom I thank for his warm words expressing your common sentiments. I greet the priests who have accompanied you, the women religious, the members of the Synod Assembly and the pastoral workers who represent the whole Church in Vigevano.

At the end of the Diocesan Synod, an extraordinarily important event which has involved the whole Diocese for the past three years, you have wished to make a pilgrimage to Rome to the tombs of the Apostles. You have wished to meet the Pope and hear his words encouraging and strengthening you in your faith and apostolic commitment.

Thank you for this visit! I welcome you with joy and congratulate you on your zeal. I fervently hope that the Synod's work will renew the missionary enthusiasm of the entire diocesan community. In a particular way, the Synodal Constitutions must serve as a compass, showing every believer the path to follow in this time rich in social and religious challenges.

2. *"Put out into the deep and let down your nets"* (Lk 5:4).

How many times have you heard and meditated on these words throughout the Synod process! Today too I repeat them to you.

Church in Vigevano, put out into the deep; do not be afraid to venture onto the high seas! Be not afraid of the great challenges of the present time! Advance with confidence on the path of the new evangelization, in loving service to the poor and in bearing courageous witness in the various areas of society. Know that you bring a message which is for every person and for all mankind; be builders of real brotherhood and universal solidarity.

This invitation is first addressed to you, dear priests, who have been configured to Christ, the "Head and Shepherd", by the sacrament of Holy Orders and appointed to lead his people. Grateful for the immense gift you have received, you generously carry out your task, seeking support in intense prayer and in ongoing theological and pastoral renewal.

This invitation is also extended to you, women religious, who are a treasured spiritual resource for the Christian people, and to all of you, dear lay faithful, who have come in such large numbers. Everywhere may you know how "to account for the hope that is in you" (cf. 1 Pt 3:15).

3. During the Synod you devoted special attention to young people and the family. Continue to support families and to help them, so that they can be authentic communities of life and love. With ceaseless care, spare no energy in the Christian formation of children, adolescents and young people. They need sound guideposts: be examples of human and Christian fidelity for them. Vocations to the priesthood and the consecrated life are born and develop in a context of faithfulness to the Gospel. Thanks be to God that in your Diocese there is a comforting increase in vocations and all the seminarians are here with the diaconal community. May the Lord who has called them help them persevere to the end.

During the Synod you were also rightly concerned to bring the living proclamation of the Gospel to those who are "far away", not fearing to meet the challenges of postmodern culture. Continue in this effort, using every tool you can. And in this regard, how can you not remember that this year you are celebrating another happy event: the centenary of the Catholic weekly *L'Araldo Lomellino*? This praiseworthy periodical should not only be supported but appropriately enhanced. Along with it, make it your concern to utilize every modern means of social communication for the service of evangelization.

4. Dear brothers and sisters, the Bishop just mentioned that your cathedral has recently been restored to its original splendour. It is the heart and image of the Christian community. May you be the "living stones" of the spiritual edifice which is the Church in Vigevano. Walk in unity towards the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, so that it will be a providential time of conversion and spiritual revival.

May Blessed Mary, whom you venerate with the title *Madonna della Bozzola*, watch over your family as a caring Mother. May the patron saints of the Diocese, Ambrose and Charles, protect you. And may my Blessing, which I cordially extend to your whole diocesan community, be a comfort and encouragement to you.

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