



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II TO THE PONTIFICAL SWISS GUARDS

Friday, 5 May 2000

Dear Commandant,

Dear Guards,

Dear Relatives and Friends of the Swiss Guard!

1. Since the origins of the Swiss Guard, you have been linked with 6 May by an uninterrupted tradition that reminds you of your special commitment to the life and well-being of the Successor of St Peter. So this year it is again a joy for me to receive you and your parents, relatives and friends in the Apostolic Palace. I extend a special welcome to the new recruits who will be enrolled in your corps when they take their oath of loyalty. They thereby commit themselves to devoting several years of their life to a very honourable and responsible task in the heart of the universal Church.

2. In this connection, something Jesus said about his disciples comes to mind: "Every one who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and inherit eternal life" (*Mt 19: 29*).

Dear young recruits, this promise also applies in a certain way to you! You too have left father and mother, brothers and sisters, lands and homes for the sake of a spiritual and religious value. You have declared yourselves ready, for a certain time, to render an important service to the Bishop of Rome and Successor of Peter. You are determined to guarantee him the necessary security, so that he can devote himself to people freely and without hindrance and preach the Gospel to them.

3. Like the disciples in Jesus' time, you too, as young men at the start of a new millennium, are troubled by many anxious questions: will serving in the Pontifical Swiss Guard in distant Rome really be worthwhile? Will it not hold a young man back in his career? Will it not delay him for too long from starting a family?

I want to tell you the truth: I am deeply convinced that your service will be rewarded. Not in the sense of money, but of a compensation that cannot be paid in money. One condition is necessary: that you consider this new phase in your life as a call from God and devote all your energies to your job and to the fellowship of your comrades. I gladly offer you a motto for your service: whatever you do, do it completely! If your stay in the Eternal City is guided by this motto, you will then return home to Switzerland as men mature in soul and body, whose love for the Church and her Supreme Pastor will be deeper and wiser.

4. Right now during the year of the Great Jubilee, many people come up to you at the Vatican's gates. So you can understand the many reasons why someone visits St Peter's Square and the Museums, the Audience Hall and St Peter's Basilica: curiosity, interest in art or religious sentiment, but also true Catholic devotion, which leads through many doors to the Holy Door. This variety of motives also challenges you to take a position. You must show, less in words than by your living witness, what it personally means to you to serve at Peter's tomb. I am sure that your experience in the heart of the universal Church will leave a deep impression on your heart. Later you will be able to pass on to your families and friends in Switzerland the treasure of a faith which has matured in Rome. At the same time, you will help to reinforce the bonds between the Successor of Peter and your country.

5. I warmly congratulate you on joining the Swiss Guard. The Pope is counting on you! I also extend a grateful greeting to your parents, brothers, sisters and friends. They have willingly accepted the fact that their son, their brother, their friend will be away for some time to serve at the very centre of the universal Church. Our meeting today at this audience is a first-fruit of your decision. May your stay in Rome enable you to live in ever greater intimacy with Christ and to follow him! During this Great Jubilee the Holy Door is wide open, the door that represents Christ, who came to earth so that we might have life and have it in abundance (cf. *Jn 10: 10*). I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing to you and to your relatives and friends.