



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE 20th PLENARY ASSEMBLY
OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE LAITY**

Saturday, 21 November 2002

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. *"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all"* (II Cor 13,13). I address the Apostle Paul's greeting to the Corinthians to you who have gathered for the 20th Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Laity.

First, I greet the President, Cardinal James Francis Stafford, the Secretary, the Undersecretary and all the personnel of the Office. I greet you, dear members and consultants of this Pontifical Council, who come from different countries and continents.

I think of you, brothers and sisters, who represent the variety of experiences of the lay members of Christ's faithful and serve the Successor of Peter in the sector of responsibility of this Council. As I offer each of you a most cordial welcome, I desire to express my deep gratitude for the generous availability with which you offer your faithful and qualified collaboration.

2. The work of the Plenary Assembly is taking place as we observe the 40th anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council. The greatest ecclesial event of our time has made the promotion of lay people flow like a strong tide into the river of the Church's renewed consciousness of being a mystery of missionary communion. On the occasion of the Jubilee of the Apostolate of the Laity in the year 2000, I invited all the baptized to turn again to the Second Vatican Council, to take the documents into their hands in order to rediscover the richness of the doctrinal and pastoral incentives.

As I did two years ago, today I repeat this invitation to the laity. To them "the Council opened

extraordinary perspectives of commitment and involvement in the Church's mission", reminding them of their special participation in Christ's priestly, prophetic and kingly function (*Mass for the Jubilee of the Apostolate of the Laity*, 26 November 2000, n. 3; *ORE*, 29 November 2000, p. 1). For this reason, returning to the Council means collaborating in the continuation of its practical application in accord with the orientations drawn up in the Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici* and in the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio ineunte*. Today we need lay faithful, who are aware of their evangelical vocation and their responsibility as disciples of Christ, to witness to charity and solidarity in all the situations of modern society.

3. The theme you have chosen for your assembly: "*The need to continue on our path setting out anew from Christ, that is, from the Eucharist*" is a theme that completes the itinerary of the sacraments of Christian initiation which began with your reflection on Baptism and Confirmation during the last two plenary meetings. The reflection on the sacraments of Christian initiation naturally draws attention to the parish, the community in which these great mysteries are celebrated. The parish community is the heart of liturgical life; it is the place of catechesis and of education in the faith (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 2226). In the parish the process of initiation and formation takes place for all Christians. How important it is to rediscover the value and importance of the parish as the place where the content of Catholic tradition is passed on!

Many baptized people, due to the impact of the strong currents of de-Christianization, seem to have lost contact with this religious heritage. Faith is often confined to episodes and fragments of life. A certain relativism tends to feed discriminating attitudes toward the content of Catholic doctrine and morals, accepted or rejected on the basis of subjective and arbitrary preference. So the faith received ceases to be lived as a divine gift, as an extraordinary opportunity for human and Christian growth, as a meaningful event leading, as conversion of life. Only a faith that sinks its roots in the Church's sacramental life, whose thirst is quenched at the sources of God's Word and Tradition, that becomes new life and a renewed understanding of reality, can make the baptized effectively capable of withstanding the impact of the prevailing secularized culture.

4. The Eucharist completes and crowns Christian initiation, "the source and summit of the Christian life" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 11). It increases our union with Christ, separates and preserves us from sin, strengthens the bonds of charity, sustains our strength during the pilgrimage of life, and gives us a foretaste of the glory to which we are destined. The lay faithful, sharing in the priestly office of Christ, in the celebration of the Eucharist present their lives - affections and suffering, family and married life, work and the commitments they assume in society - as a spiritual offering pleasing to the Father, consecrating the world to God (*Lumen gentium*, n. 34).

The Church and the Eucharist permeate each other in the mystery of *communio*, a miracle of unity among human beings in a world where human relations are often darkened by antagonisms if not actually destroyed by enmity.

I encourage you to keep this centrality of the Eucharist present in your formation and in your participation in the life of the parochial and diocesan communities. It is important always to start afresh from Christ, that is, from the Eucharist, in the full depth of his mystery.

5. A prayer that helps to penetrate Christ's mystery with the vision of the Virgin Mary is the Rosary, which has become a familiar contemplative experience for me and for countless members of the faithful. Dear brothers and sisters, entrust yourselves to Mary with this prayer. In her immaculate womb the human body of Jesus of Nazareth was formed, who died and rose, and who comes to meet us in the Eucharist.

Dear members and consultors of the Pontifical Council of the Laity, to whom I feel particularly bound since as Archbishop of Krakow I was one of your consultors, the Eucharist will make you capable of carrying out your important mission at the service of a "mature and fruitful epiphany of the Catholic laity" (*General Audience*, 25 November 1998, n. 6; *ORE*, 2 December 1998, p. 19).

With these sentiments, I impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you and to your loved ones.