



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO A GROUP OF PILGRIMS FROM SAINT-FOUR
ACCOMPANIED BY BISHOP RENÉ SÉJOURNÉ**

Saturday, 10 May 2003

Dear Friends,

1. I address a cordial welcome to Bishop René Séjourné of Saint-Flour, who was an appreciated collaborator of the Secretariat of State, as well as to the delegation from the diocese which has come to celebrate the Pope of the year 1000, Sylvester II, on the occasion of the 1,000th anniversary of his death.

2. I am pleased to be able to recall some distinctive features of the person described as the "most cultured man of his times". Indeed, Gerbert of Aurillac stood out uniquely in his century because of his knowledge and erudition, his moral standing and sense of the spiritual. At the same time, he was an intellectual and a man of action, a diplomat and a man of the Church. The issues today may be different from those he had to face, but his spiritual and intellectual attitude remains an appeal to seek the human truth which is never opposed to the truths of the faith. "Let us always unite knowledge and faith", he used to say.

3. It is essential to stress the European dimension of his ministry, for he was attentive to the life of the Church in the nations then being formed. As a Benedictine from the monastery of Saint-Géraud of Aurillac, he belonged to the Order whose different houses helped to shape Europe. He was first Archbishop of Rheims, then of Ravenna, and in 999 became the first French Pope. He actively participated in this movement; for example, in the year 1000, he founded in Gniezno the first metropolitan Church of Poland, among whose suffragans was the new Diocese of Kraków of which I was Pastor. Gerbert thus contributed to the intellectual rebirth and vitality of the continent.

His example helps us understand that it will only be possible to build Europe if it clearly recognizes its Christian roots. They constitute an essential dimension of its identity and have left their mark on the cultural, artistic, juridical and philosophical production of the continent.

4. While praiseworthy efforts are underway to give a juridical form to Europe, it is good to remember this initial impulse, contributed by a Frenchmen at the beginning of the second millennium. By spreading the Gospel and participating in the life of their respective nations, Christians today are still eager to participate in building society. Through you, I gladly encourage the people of France to draw from their spiritual roots the elements they need for their own existence and for a life in fraternal solidarity with their brothers and sisters on the continent.

5. At the end of this audience, I entrust you to the intercession of Our Lady, and I wholeheartedly impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you, to your families and to all the members of the Diocese of Saint-Flour.