



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PONTIFICAL LOMBARD SEMINARY**

Friday, 27 March 1998

1. I am delighted to receive you, the superiors and students of the Pontifical Lombard Seminary, and I warmly welcome each of you to the Apostolic Palace. I thank you, Monsignor, for what you have just said in the name of those present.

Dear friends, I am particularly pleased to meet you during the centenary year of the birth of the Servant of God Pope Paul VI. He spent an important period of his formation at your seminary; years later, called by divine Providence to guide the universal Church, he described it in these terms: "The Lombard Seminary has its own spirit, its own style, its own pedagogy, because from a tradition, from a school, from an experience built up over time ... it derives its art of forming all those who put their trust in it, not so much as guests and strangers, but as members, as sons, indeed as heirs to a tradition, distinguished not without reason by the saints for whom the seminary is named: Ambrose and Charles" (*Insegnamenti di Paolo VI*, vol. III, 1965, p. 605).

Certainly it was also at the school of the Lombard Seminary and of the ecclesial spirit which enlivens it that Paul VI developed that passion for the Gospel and the Church which marked his whole life.

2. In meeting you today, dear brothers in the priesthood, I would like to greet your Bishops through you. They have very fittingly asked you to further your intellectual, spiritual and pastoral formation here in Rome, the centre of Christianity. The Church needs competent ministers, endowed with divine wisdom, that wisdom which takes form and face in the person of Jesus (cf. 1 Cor 1:24). In our time, when the Italian ecclesial community is promoting its "cultural project" aimed at dialogue with the people of today, your ministry as priests needs a proper doctrinal and ascetical preparation. You are not called to offer the world gold and silver, but the only treasure the Church has, the Gospel of her Lord (cf. Acts 3:6). Obviously, this requires a trained, up-to-date ministry which can combine scholarly rigour with the vision of Christ's love, the search for truth with the witness of a Gospel life, the proclamation of faith with the love that flows from Jesus' life and represents the ultimate standard for life and the priestly ministry itself.

The years you spend in Rome are therefore a privileged opportunity not only to deepen the bonds linking you, as Christ's ministers, with the universal Church and the See of Peter, but also to appreciate the singular service to the truth which spreads from this city throughout the world. Rome has the unique privilege of expressing both the diocesan and the universal dimensions. Of course, the Roman experience occupies a relatively short period in your priestly mission. As Paul VI said to the Lombard Seminary: "You are here, but your hearts are set on the ministry you will be assigned. With this orientation towards the future ... it is also a force, and is called love, fidelity, service, vocation and sacrifice. Each one has his own. This is the dynamic of a seminary; and the Lombard Seminary lives it" (*Insegnamenti di Paolo VI*, vol. III, 1965, p. 607).

May the experience of these years thus help to increase your love for your Dioceses and, at the same time, for the communion of the whole Catholic Church. Dear young men, offer the sacrifice of spending most of your time now in the solitude of your rooms and over your textbooks for the people who will be entrusted to your pastoral care. You are not spending these years of formation in an unfruitful priestly ministry, because through prayer and study you are becoming more and more conformed to Christ in order to serve him faithfully in the Church. Thus be generous and open your hearts to divine grace. Your apostolate and the whole Church, in which you have been chosen and ordained, will reap the benefits.

3. As a form of priestly community, the seminary helps you daily experience that the condition of your ministry is fraternal life and the sharing of your vocation.

A community of young priests is very different from a simple structure offering hospitality: the experience of community life fosters an authentically ecclesial spirit in those who live it intensely and thus becomes a valid proof of their growth in obedience to God's will and in service to their brothers and sisters. It also helps them understand that the first to benefit from their ministry are those whom the Lord puts at their side each day and who share in the labour of building up the kingdom.

4. As the 20th century draws to a close, this formation period marks out a spiritual journey for each of you, which represents an even more demanding preparation for your future apostolate. You are in fact the priests of the third millennium! Prepare yourselves to offer your ministerial service with generous enthusiasm for the Gospel, together with an unlimited love for Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life. May this Lenten season help increase your understanding of the value and meaning of your mission.

The Lombard Seminary faces the Basilica of St Mary Major, giving those who stay there the opportunity of frequent recourse to the Blessed Virgin, Mother of God. Call upon her, dear friends, so that she will accompany you in your growth as Christians and priests and bring to your present and future ministry the abundant grace of the Holy Spirit, who brought about in her the mystery of the divine motherhood. May Mary help you to persevere in following Christ with fidelity and joy, and always to cherish a fruitful devotion to the flock entrusted to you.

With these sentiments, I cordially impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you and to those who guide you, as well as to your relatives and loved ones.

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