



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE MEMBERS OF THE INTERNATIONAL COLLEGE
ST BERNARD IN URBE**

Thursday 3 May 2001

Dear Brothers and Sisters!

1. With great joy I welcome you and I extend my cordial greeting to each of you. I greet, in particular, Abbot Ugo Gianluigi Tagni and I thank him for the words expressing your sentiments.

My greeting and my cordial appreciation go also to the Daughters of the Heart of Mary Missionary Sisters who, like mothers and sisters, assist the guests of the International College, opened by the Cistercian monks with praiseworthy attention to the Church's pastoral needs. It welcomes priests and religious of various nationalities who have come to Rome to complete their studies by attending the city's numerous academic centres. Finding themselves together in a place that is so suitable to the requirements of those who have been called to devote themselves to the priestly ministry makes it possible to achieve a wonderful exchange of gifts that is certainly useful for their future apostolic activity.

The contact, then, with the typical spirituality of the Cistercian monastic order gives the opportunity to take advantage of another possibility for spiritual and apostolic formation. My sincere hope is that each of you may draw abundantly from this source, which has over the centuries nourished so many concrete realizations of consecrated life.

2. As you are well aware, the monastic life is characterized by a constant call to *conversion*. The Rule of St Benedict, from which the Cistercian Order takes its inspiration, prescribes that a candidate to monastic life promise, in the presence of all the community, a sincere and radical conversion, with the help of God and relying on the intercession of his holy patrons (cf. *R.B.* 58: 17). It is not just a typical exercise of the Lenten period, but must form the aspiration of the

Christian towards a truly evangelical life. It is, in other words, the sincere and uninterrupted effort that individual baptized persons, and especially priests and religious, must nourish in order to tend to holiness.

I would like here to recall what I already have said in my recent Apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte*, that "the time has come to re-propose wholeheartedly to everyone this *high standard of ordinary Christian living*" (n. 31). This is even more valid for you, dear Brothers ordained for the service of the Christian people. Jesus asks you as he did Peter: "Simon, Son of John, do you love me more than these?" (Jn 21: 15). And he awaits your answer, expressed not only in words, but also, and above all, in the concreteness of your daily choices.

In the school of Cistercian spirituality, you are encouraged to direct your entire existence to the contemplation of God, according to the advice of St Benedict: "put nothing before the love of Christ" (cf. *R.B.* 4: 21 and 72: 11). May the monastic experience likewise encourage you to practise *lectio divina*, to celebrate together the *Liturgy of the Hours*, especially the *Eucharist* every day, and to prolong your intimacy with the Lord in *Eucharistic adoration*. The concern for your studies must not distract you from daily immersion in God. In fact, only from him can you draw the strength that is essential for the apostolate that will be entrusted to you by your superiors when you return to your respective countries and dioceses.

The authentic theologian is he who prays. It was in this perspective that I wrote in the Apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte*: "We who have received the grace of believing in Christ, the revealer of the Father and the Saviour of the world, have the duty to show to what depths the relationship with Christ can lead" (n. 33).

3. From unceasing contemplation that leads to an increasing intimacy with God comes the need for communion among you and with your brothers. You come from numerous countries and religious institutes: the variety of rites, cultures, experiences or pastoral needs of your communities and local Churches forms a meaningful patrimony that should be shared and which must impel you to love all the more the one Church of Christ. In fact, it is the Church that the Lord asks you to serve with the multiplicity of your charisms and pastoral services.

Let Sts Benedict and Bernard inspire you to live ecclesial communion in great fraternity. Before you shines the example of many saints who have drawn unceasing inspiration from the Benedictine and Cistercian spring. Look especially to St Bernard, your great spiritual master, a man of contemplation and action. With regard to the different religious orders, he noted with deep wisdom: "We all need one another: the spiritual good that I do not have and do not possess, I receive from others.... And all our diversities, which manifest the wealth of God's gifts, will exist in the one house of the Father, which has many rooms. Now there is a difference of graces: then there will be distinction of glory. Both here and there unity consists in the same charity" (*Apology to William of St Thierry*, IV, 8: *PL* 182: 903-904).

May your College therefore be a Cenacle: a place where, in assiduous and harmonious prayer with Mary, the Mother of Jesus (cf. Acts 1: 14), you should be of one heart and one soul (cf. *ibid.*, 4: 32). A school of fraternal life where, as St Benedict teaches (cf. *R.B.* 72: 4 ff.), each one competes with the other in paying reciprocal honour, while supporting each other's weakness with the greatest patience. May no one seek his own advantage but rather that of others, loving his neighbour with chaste love. The lifestyle, the experience of communion between priests and religious will be of valid help to you in your communities of origin when, having finished the time of your formation here in Rome, you will undertake the work to which the Holy Spirit will call you.

May Mary, whom we wish to invoke as *Mater boni consilii*, watch over your good intentions and your entire daily activity. Dear friends, have constant recourse to her and to her intercession. With these sentiments, I cordially bless each and every one of you.