



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE RECTOR, STAFF AND STUDENTS
OF THE IRISH COLLEGE**

28 March 1998

*Your Grace,
Dear Brother Priests,
Dear Seminarians,*

It gives me great joy to welcome you, the Rector, Staff and Students of the Irish College, accompanied by the Archbishop of Armagh, as you celebrate the Fiftieth Anniversary of the granting of Pontifical Status. I join you in thanking God for all that the College has represented for the Church in Ireland and for the Irish community in Rome since its foundation in 1628, and most particularly in the last half-century. It is enough to recall the names of those connected with the College to have an idea of its rich spiritual and cultural heritage: the founders, Cardinal Ludovico Ludovisi and Father Luke Wadding; its martyr, Saint Oliver Plunkett; Ireland's first Cardinal, Paul Cullen; and the spiritual writer, Dom Columba Marmion. Their example of holiness and zeal should be an inspiration, especially to you seminarians, as you prepare to make the Gospel better known to the men and women of our time.

Your years in Rome enable you to experience at first hand the universal dimension of the Church and to deepen the bonds of communion which unite you to the Bishop of Rome and Successor of Peter. Your understanding of the Catholic faith is enriched through the study of philosophy and theology, the discovery of the Christian monuments of this city, and daily contact with Christians from many lands.

As future teachers of the faith, you must be able to face the complexity of the times and be in a position to respond to the fundamental questions affecting people's lives, questions which can only

receive a full and definitive response in the Gospel of Jesus Christ (cf. *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 56).

Above all, you must be men of prayer. A deep intimacy with Christ, possible only through spending time with him, is necessary in order to be able to lead others to him. The Seminary years should be a time of faithful meditation on the word of God and active participation in the sacraments and the Divine Office. Especially in the Mass, in which the Irish have always found the spiritual strength to live through the times of greatest hardship (cf. *Homily in the Phoenix Park*, 29 September 1979, No. 1), you grow in friendship with Christ and receive the inner strength to respond generously to his call.

I pray that the Pontifical Irish College will continue to fulfil its mission to form priests imbued with love of God and zeal for the spread of the Gospel. Remember Saint Patrick's recommendation: *Ut Christiani, ita et Romani sitis!* Entrusting you and your families to the intercession of Mary, Queen of Ireland, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.

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