



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PLENARY MEETING OF THE
PONTIFICAL COUNCIL "COR UNUM"**

Thursday, 12 November 1998

Venerable and Dear Brothers and Sisters of the Pontifical Council "Cor Unum",

1. I welcome you with great joy on the occasion of the plenary assembly of your dicastery which, with the approach of the Year 2000, is dedicated to the Great Jubilee. I thank your President, Archbishop Paul Josef Cordes, for his cordial address on behalf of you all. At the same time, I express my appreciation to the members, officials and consultors of the dicastery for the dedication with which they carry out their work and, in particular, for their commitment to preparing for the Jubilee in the best possible way. In my Apostolic Letter *Tertio millennio adveniente*, I suggested to all the faithful that they live this last year of immediate preparation for the Jubilee as "a journey to the Father" (n. 50), deepening their understanding of the virtue of charity. It is precisely from this that the theme of your encounter is drawn: "*Towards the Great Jubilee — 1999: the Father of Love*". I am sure that your reflections on this theme will help you prepare useful initiatives in view of this historic event.

2. The human heart has always reflected on great questions such as, for example, the mystery of God's justice in relation to the problem of evil and pain, because the human being carries within him the yearning to live and fulfil himself in love. For those who look at their neighbour with love, the poverty present in the world is cause for great anxiety and sometimes the unjust suffering of many can also instill doubts about the goodness and providence of God. We cannot remain indifferent to such situations; in fact, the Great Jubilee must become a suitable opportunity to *renew our faith commitment to God*, who in his fatherhood loves man with a matchless and infinite love, *and to increase our generosity to those who are in difficulty*.

The Pontifical Council "Cor Unum" is called to express *the universal Church's attention to the poor* and, in particular, *the Holy Father's concern* for their sufferings and miseries. Your dicastery is thus a vehicle for the mission the Church has always carried out in favour of the neediest, bringing about what Christ witnessed to with his life and bequeathed as a

testament to his disciples. The parable of the Good Samaritan is symbolic in this regard: a foreigner bends lovingly over the person who has been robbed and injured and makes time and money available to care for him. He is the image of Jesus, who gave his life to save man: man who is suffering, who is alone, who is a victim of violence and sin.

In another well-known Gospel passage concerning the last judgement, the Lord identifies himself with those who are hungry, thirsty, ill and in prison (cf. Mt 25:40, 45). *In Christ, therefore, we contemplate the love of God* which is incarnate and penetrates all human reality, to assume it, without any compromise with sin, even in its most painful and problematic aspects. He “went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil” (Acts 10:38). In the person of the Son of God made man it becomes manifest that God is love not only in words, but “in deed and in truth” (1 Jn 3:18). Thus *Christ’s preaching is always accompanied by signs* that bear witness to what he reveals regarding the Father. His attention to the sick, the marginalized and the suffering reveals that for God, service to man is more important than the material observance of the law. God’s love guarantees that man is not condemned to suffering and death, but can be freed and redeemed from every slavery.

In fact a deeper evil exists, against which Christ puts a true and proper struggle into action. It is the war against sin, against the spirit of evil, that forces man into slavery. Jesus’ miracles are signs of *the full healing of the person that always starts from the heart*, as he himself explained when he cured the paralytic: “But that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins”, he then said to the paralytic, “rise, take up your bed and go home” (Mt 9:5-6). We thus recognize in his preaching and actions his concern for the needs of the spirit, which require love, and for those of the body, which asks to be relieved of pain.

3. Dear brothers and sisters, you *represent the many Catholic organizations* which support the charitable work of the Church throughout the world. I wish to express my particular gratitude for the variety of activities you carry out in the name of the ecclesial community, bearing witness in many ways to Christ’s love for the poor. Your work is a sign of hope for so many people and forms part of the *new evangelization* which the Church is carrying out in this passage from one millennium to the next. This evangelization asks us to unite *action with words* and witness with proclamation, spreading the Gospel of love in every direction. By their presence in the world of poverty and suffering, Christians wish to offer modern man eloquent signs of the fatherhood of God, aware that the heavenly Father inspires true love in our hearts.

I know that your Pontifical Council has taken especially to heart the instructions offered in the Apostolic Letter *Tertio millennio adveniente* for next year, dedicated to God the Father. I am grateful because you have wished to become mediators of this message and to promote several *initiatives to make visible that sharing of goods* to which the first apostolic community offered a moving witness.

In particular, I wish to mention the “*100 Projects of the Holy Father*”. With this initiative some charitable aid agencies and Dioceses richer in resources have supported development projects in some of the earth’s less fortunate regions. These projects have a common denominator in the “corporal and spiritual works of mercy”, which have always been stressed by ecclesial tradition in order to put into practice the commandment of love and to satisfy man’s physical and spiritual needs. It is thus demonstrated how ecclesial communion knows no divisions of “tribe and tongue and people and nation” (Rv 5:9), and how it cares for the whole person, broadening out to become a truly universal vision.

The initiative called "*Panis caritatis*" also deserves mention. It is spreading in Italy and its principal aim is to make visible the bonds of brotherhood and communion that must bind men to one another because of their common relationship to God, Father of all mankind.

4. Apart from the vast and important programmes that Catholic organizations carry out in many of the world's nations, all these initiatives show that the Church is sensitive to human needs. She is nonetheless aware of and at the same time witnesses to the fact that the immediate needs of the human being are not the only ones nor the most important. In this regard, Jesus says in the Gospel: "Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?" (Mt 6:25). Man is a creature open to the transcendent and in his inmost heart feels a profound yearning for truth and goodness, which alone can fully satisfy his needs. Today, as in every age, *the hunger and thirst for God* in minds are never quenched. The Church feels called to be a messenger to contemporary man, bringing him the proclamation of the grace and mercy given by God the Father in Christ Jesus. The activity of the Pontifical Council "Cor Unum" falls within this area, as a sign of a greater salvation which concerns man's deepest dimension and is fulfilled in eternal life.

In this perspective, oriented to that love which "never ends" (1 Cor 13:8), I hope in 1999, the eve of the Great Jubilee, that your work which is so important for the Church and for Christian witness in today's world may fully and effectively express her message of love and brotherhood. To this end, I assure you of my constant support in prayer and cordially impart to you all my Apostolic Blessing, which I willingly extend to all, wherever in the world they may be, who co-operate with your dicastery in serving the poorest and neediest.

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