



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE COMMUNITY
OF THE POLISH MAJOR SEMINARY OF RADOM***

Tuesday, 9 December 2003

I offer you all a warm welcome. I am delighted to be able to receive the Major Seminary of the Diocese of Radom, which, in a certain sense, is reciprocating my Visit. Of course, those I met at Radom have long since left the Seminary and today serve the Church as priests with much experience. Yet a well-known characteristic of every community is the historical and spiritual continuity that constitutes its wealth.

Therefore, allow me, through you and your Bishops, to thank your Seminary for the welcome accorded to me in 1991 when I had the opportunity to bless the new premises. I thank Bishop Zygmunt Zimowski for the words he has just addressed to me. I welcome the Auxiliary Bishops and the Bishop emeritus. I am delighted that all the Bishops of Radom have accompanied the seminarians on their pilgrimage to the Apostolic threshold. I also greet the rector, the formation staff, the spiritual fathers, the teachers as well as the lay collaborators at the Seminary and the other people who have accompanied you.

I began with the thought of the historical and spiritual continuity of the Seminary. It is therefore necessary, at least briefly, to embrace in our minds the entire heritage from which your Seminary sprang and of which it is heir. You know well that your Seminary originated in the Diocese of Kraków, to which Sandomierz belonged, in 1635, when Fr Mikołaj Leopoldowicz founded the new Major Seminary. It acquired the reputation of being not only a formation house, but also a centre of knowledge.

As the decades passed, often through the initiative of the Bishops and Canons of Kraków, the chairs of scholastic theology, canon law, biblical studies and Church history were created. They were set up for the overall training of clergy for the Diocese of Kraków.

I am speaking of this connection with Kraków to point out the common roots, which also means the common heritage, which we share. It undoubtedly contains the legacy of faith and courage left by St Stanislaus, the wisdom and magnanimity of John of Kety, the zeal and compassion of Peter Skarga and of many other great priests of our Country. We must always return to this heritage of holiness and priestly dedication to Christ, to the Church and to the faithful, so that the multitudes of priests today may continue their work fruitfully.

The end of the 18th century, after the suppression of the Society of Jesus, linked your Seminary with Kielce, up to the creation of the Diocese of Sandomierz in 1818. Two years later, it was able to return to Sandomierz. Modern times brought first a partial association with Radom, and finally, the foundation of a separate seminary for this Diocese.

I express my deep gratitude to Bishop Edward Materski for his work in creating the Diocese for which he guaranteed the important institution of the Major Seminary. I am pleased that the community - new, but with a rich tradition - is being consolidated and is growing. I ardently believe it will produce good pastors, modelled on Christ.

I know that the motto "*imitare quod tractabis*", "imitate what you will celebrate", accompanies you in this year of formation. It is an invitation that each one of you seminarians - please God - will hear during your ordination liturgy. It is normally mentioned in connection with the mysteries contained in the Eucharist and in its celebration. Actually, the deepest content of this call seems to flow directly from Christ's words: "Do this in remembrance of me" (Lk 22: 19). And the "remembrance of Christ" is his entire earthly life, but above all its Paschal conclusion.

How can we fail to see the link between this call and the humble, loving act of the washing of the feet in the Upper Room: "Do you know what I have done to you?... For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you" (Jn 13: 12, 15). How can we fail to connect this with his powerful invitation: "Take this, all of you, and eat it: this is my body which will be given up for you" - words which were to be fulfilled the following day on the tree of the Cross.

This is his total dedication of himself in the love of the Father and for humanity. Such dedication will be demanded of you by God and by men and women when the Church calls you to "imitate what you will celebrate". And then you must remember that the Resurrection and Pentecost are also intrinsic to "the remembrance of Christ".

May you always believe that the Risen One himself, who has provided you with the power of the Holy Spirit, goes with you on the highways of the world. Then your dedication to God and to men and women will not be a burden but a confident and joyful participation in the eternal priesthood of Christ. Prepare yourselves from this very day for this act of entrustment that is linked to assuming responsibility for the "remembrance of Christ".

"Imitate what you will celebrate". A priest's pastoral service consists of a variety of actions of which, as the Council says, the Eucharist is the source and summit (cf. *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, n. 5). Whatever its form, the invitation to imitate their deepest meaning is always timely and right. If a priest celebrates Baptism - the sacrament of justification - is it not also his duty to be a witness of the justifying grace in his every action? If he prepares young people for the sacrament of Confirmation, which enables them to participate in the prophetic mission of the Church, should not he himself first be a faithful Gospel messenger? Thus, whenever he teaches, blesses marriages, accompanies the sick and prepares them for death, whenever he meets families - he himself must always witness first to the content of his service.

It is not humanly easy to carry out such a task. For this very reason it is necessary to seek the help of the One who sends out labourers into his harvest (cf. Mt 9: 38). In your life today and above all in the priesthood, always make room for prayer. Yes, spare no effort to prepare yourselves as best you can for your priestly tasks by a sound study of doctrine - not only theological but also of other disciplines that will help you to be in touch with your contemporaries - and by learning pastoral practices; but base this training on the solid foundations of prayer. I place this in your hearts: be men of prayer and you will succeed in imitating what you celebrate.

I entrust you all to the Patroness of your Seminary, the Immaculate Mother of God. May she accompany and protect you and bring you all the graces you need to be properly prepared for the priesthood. I cordially bless you all: in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.