



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER TO THE PONTIFICAL SEMINARY OF UMBRIA

Venerable Brother in the Lord,
Dear Seminarians,

1. I am pleased to welcome you on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the foundation of the Pontifical Seminary of Umbria. I cordially greet Bishop Sergio Goretti of Assisi-Nocera Umbra-Gualdo Tadino, and I thank him for his kind expression of the sentiments you all share. I also greet the group of teachers led by the rector of the seminary. In a special way my thoughts and my affection are addressed to you, dear young people, who in the specific educational context of the seminary are preparing to make important and critical decisions for your future.

It is precisely as part of the celebration of the 75th anniversary of your seminary's foundation, desired by my Predecessor St Pius X, that this visit to the Successor of Peter is taking place.

Besides expressing the profound spirit of ecclesial communion that animates you, it is also meant to underscore how much my Predecessors did for an institution that is among the most significant and valuable for the particular Churches of Umbria. The seminary is the spiritual heart of the region: what is done to support it redounds to the benefit of all.

2. I know that your community is steadily growing and that now there are 38 young men preparing for Holy Orders and the pastoral ministry. I congratulate you on these promising prospects and I encourage you to continue by expanding the preparatory course for entering the major seminary, already present in the individual Dioceses of Umbria, so that those who sense the gift of the divine call may enjoy a suitable period of discernment, finish any incomplete studies and grow in the spiritual life. Despite the difficulties of the moment, the Spirit of God continues to prompt in hearts the desire to give oneself totally in the service of the kingdom.

I bless all who devote their work and prayer to promoting vocations. It is a holy and absolutely necessary task. May the beloved land of Umbria, which has continually given the Church many

priests, missionaries and religious, be always rich in vocations, so that the Christian communities may never lack wise and capable leaders.

3. In our time, which seems to have fewer sound reference-points, it is important that future priests attend to their cultural training, so that they can adequately face the complex situations of the modern world with the light of faith and the living ecclesial tradition. During the years spent in the seminary, they should be concerned to acquire a capacity for wise discernment, so that they will not find themselves unprepared for the challenges and the rapid and often unforeseeable changes in the years ahead. Dear seminarians, the serious and enthusiastic study both of the human sciences and of theology forms part of your preparation.

It is also essential that you now acquire that personal maturity which will enable you to live the seminary life with a sense of responsibility and discipline, and your priestly ministry tomorrow with its commitments and demands. Learn to support and build up one other by sharing your gifts and talents. This is the most effective preparation for that witness of unity which must characterize your pastoral mission in the various communities of your region. Celibacy too, when lived responsibly and generously in the footsteps of Christ and for love of the Church, will help you to grow in the spirit of fatherhood, making you watchful, ready and attentive to the People of God.

4. The world awaits and asks for holy pastors, endowed with deep priestly spirituality. The effectiveness of pastoral service depends not so much on pastoral organization and methods, but on prayer and the depth of one's interior life. It is only those who grow in a mature relationship with God through personal and community prayer, by meditation on the Word, by participation in the Eucharist, who will then be able to offer themselves freely for the work of evangelization, to use earthly goods with moderation, to be strong and persevering in times of difficulty, to have a heart open to the needs of the poor and the suffering and to respond with humble and joyful docility to the Church's teachings.

Dear seminarians, dear teachers, your Bishops look to you with confidence and great hope. The new millennium awaits a fruitful, profound and renewed pastoral ministry. I urge you not to lose heart in the face of difficulties. May Mary, Mother of priests and a model of humble, faithful service, protect and sustain you in your daily efforts. May the great saints of your region intercede for you: St Benedict of Norcia, a sure guide in discipleship; St Francis of Assisi, who was in love with God and the Gospel; St Rita of Cascia, who worked for reconciliation, together with all the other witnesses to Christ who have made your land loved and visited by so many pilgrims from every part of the world.

I willingly accompany you with my affection and my prayer, as I sincerely impart to you and to your loved ones a special Apostolic Blessing.

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