



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE INTERNATIONAL CATECHETICAL CONGRESS HELD
TO OBSERVE THE 10th ANNIVERSARY OF THE PUBLICATION
OF THE CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH**

Friday, 11 October 2002

1. I am particularly pleased to address this International Catechetical Congress, gathered to observe the 10th anniversary of the publication of the original edition of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and the fifth anniversary of the promulgation of its Latin *editio typica*.

At the same time, at this important meeting, it is essential to recall other events of the past ten years that have had an impact on ecclesial catechesis: the 25th anniversary of the Fourth General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops of 1977 dedicated to catechesis, and the fifth anniversary of the publication in 1997 of the new edition of the General Catechetical Directory. Above all, I desire to stress that exactly 40 years ago Blessed John XXIII solemnly opened the Second Vatican Council.

The *Catechism* so often refers to it that it might well be called the *Catechism of the Second Vatican Council*. The conciliar texts constitute a sure "compass" for the believers of the third millennium.

2. I warmly thank Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, for his words that introduced our gathering and presented your work, and I thank Cardinal Darío Castrillón Hoyos, Prefect of the Congregation for the Clergy, who by mutual accord promoted and presided at this congress. I also address a cordial and grateful greeting to you, Brothers in the Episcopate, and to all of you, representatives of the various local Churches who are involved in different capacities but with the same enthusiasm and courage, in the various international and national organisms set up to promote catechesis.

3. In these days you have prayed, thought and held a dialogue about the perennial but ever new

concern of the Catholic Church: how to proclaim the Good News that Christ has entrusted to us. The theme chosen for this congress expresses it extremely well: "*Nourish us with the Word, to be 'servants of the Word' in the work of evangelization: 'euntes in mundum universum'*" (going into the whole world).

During these intense days of work, you have tried to put into practice what I wrote in the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio ineunte*: "to open [your] hearts to the tide of grace and allow the word of Christ to pass through [you] in all its power: *Duc in altum!*" (n. 38). For us to welcome and to share with others the proclamation of Christ, who is "the same yesterday, today, and for ever" (Heb 13,8): this is the incentive that must shape the life of every Christian and of every ecclesial community.

4. For the third millennium which has just begun, the Lord has given us a special instrument for the proclamation of his Word, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which I approved 10 years ago.

It has the nature of a *privileged gift*, at the disposal of the whole Catholic Church and offered "to every individual who asks us to give an account of the hope that is in us (cf. I Pt 3,15) and who wants to know what the Catholic Church believes", is what I wrote in the Apostolic Constitution *Fidei depositum* for the publication of the original edition of the *Catechism*.

As a complete, integral exposition of the Catholic truth, of the *doctrina tam de fide quam de moribus (the teaching on faith and morals)* that is always valid for all peoples, in its essential and basic content, it enables people to know and to know more deeply in a positive and serene way what the Catholic Church believes, celebrates, lives and prays.

By presenting Catholic doctrine genuinely and systematically, though in a synthesis (*non omnia sed totum*: not everything but the whole), the *Catechism* leads the entire content of catechesis to its vital centre, the Person of Christ the Lord. The ample room given to the Bible, the Eastern and Western Tradition of the Church, to the Holy Fathers, to the Magisterium, to hagiography; the central place given to the rich content of the Christian faith; the interconnection of the four parts that are the framework of the text and highlight the close connection between the *lex credendi, lex celebrandi, lex agendi, lex operandi* (the law of belief, celebration, acting and behaving), are but a few of the merits of the *Catechism* which allow us once again to be filled with wonder at the beauty and richness of the message of Christ.

5. Nor should its nature as a *collegial magisterial document* be forgotten. In fact, suggested by the Synod of Bishops of 1985, drafted by bishops as a result of the consultation of the entire Episcopate, approved by me in its original version of 1992, and promulgated in the Latin *editio typica* of 1997, destined above all for the Bishops as the authoritative teachers of Catholic faith and those who have the first responsibility for catechesis and evangelization, the text was destined to become a sound and lawfully recognized tool at the service of ecclesial communion, with the

hallmark of authority, authenticity and truthfulness that is proper to the ordinary pontifical Magisterium.

Moreover, the warm welcome and widespread distribution it has had in the past 10 years all over the world, even in non-Catholic circles, is a positive witness to its validity and continued timeliness. All this should not allow us to lessen, but rather make us intensify, our zeal for a more widespread distribution, a more eager welcome and a greater use of it in the Church and in the world, as was generally hoped for and concretely advocated during the work of this congress.

6. The Catechism is called to play a special role with regard to the drafting of local catechisms. It is offered as a sure and authentic "reference text" for them in the sensitive work at the local level of mediating the unique and perennial deposit of faith. Indeed, with the help of the Holy Spirit, it is necessary to bring together the marvellous unity of the Christian mystery and the manifold demands and situations of those who are to receive the proclamation.

To achieve this goal, the revised edition of the *General Catechetical Directory* has been available for five years. As a revision of the 1971 Directory that the Second Vatican Council called for, the new text is an important document to guide and encourage the catechetical renewal that is indispensable for the whole Church.

As is clearly indicated in the preface that sums up the content of the faith presented by the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, it particularly offers norms and criteria for its presentation, and basic principles for drafting *catechisms* for particular and local Churches. It formulates the essential lines and basic directions of a sound and rich pedagogy of the faith, inspired by the divine pedagogy and attentive to the multiple, complex situations of those who are the intended audience of the catechetical proclamation, who also live in a manifold cultural universe.

7. I cordially hope that your work will contribute to giving greater emphasis to the pastoral priority of a clear, motivated, integral, systematic and when necessary, also apologetic, catechesis. Such a catechesis will be impressed on the minds and hearts to nourish prayer, shape a Christian lifestyle and direct the conduct of the faithful.

On the participants of the Congress and upon your work, I invoke the protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the perfect "Servant of the Word", who continues to walk ahead of us to show us the Way, to keep our eyes fixed on the Truth and obtain for us every grace of Life, which flows only from Jesus Christ, her Son and our Lord. With my Blessing.
