

Text of Talk to U.S. Bishops

Following is the address of Pope John Paul II at the UN General Assembly Oct. 2.

Dear Brothers in our Lord Jesus Christ,

May I tell you very simply how grateful I am to you for your invitation to come to the United States. It is an immense joy for me to make this pastoral visit, and in particular, to be here with you today.

On this occasion I thank you, not only for your invitation, not only for everything you have done to prepare for my visit, but also for your partnership in the Gospel from the time of my election as Pope. I thank you for your service to God's holy people, for your fidelity to Christ our Lord, and for your unity with my predecessors and with me in the Church and in the College of Bishops.

I wish at this time to render public homage to a long tradition of fidelity to the Apostolic See on the part of the American Hierarchy. During the course of two centuries, this tradition has edified your people, authenticated your apostolate, and enriched the universal Church.

Moreover, I wish to acknowledge with deep appreciation the fidelity of your faithful and the renowned vitality that they have shown in Christian life. This vitality has been manifested not only in the sacramental practice of communities but also in

bishops together with him who both presided over this collegial assembly and was recognized by it as totius Ecclesiae Pastor - invested with "full, supreme and universal power over the Church." I come to you as one who has been personally edified, and enriched by participation in the Synod of Bishops; one who was supported and assisted by the fraternal interest and self-giving of American bishops who travelled to Poland in order to express solidarity with the Church in my country. I come as one who found deep spiritual consolation for my pastoral activity in the encouragement of the Roman Pontiffs with whom, and under whom, I served God's people, and in particular in the encouragement of Paul VI, whom I looked upon not only as head of the College of Bishops, but also as my own spiritual father. And today, under the sign of collegiality and because of a mysterious design of God's providence, I, your brother in Jesus, now come to you as a Successor of Peter in the See of Rome, and therefore as Pastor of the whole Church.

Because of my personal pastoral responsibility, and because of our common pastoral responsibility for the people of God in the United States, I desire to strengthen you in your ministry of faith as local pastors, and to

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abundant fruits of the Holy Spirit. With great zeal your people have endeavored to build up the Kingdom of God by means of the Catholic school and through all catechetical efforts. An evident concern for others has been a real part of American Catholicism, and today I thank the American Catholics for their generosity. Their support has benefited the dioceses of the United States, and a widespread network of charitable works and self-help projects, including those sponsored by Catholic Relief Services and the Campaign for Human Development. Moreover, the help given to the missions by the Church in the United States remains a lasting contribution to the cause of Christ's Gospel. Because your faithful have been very generous to the Apostolic See, my predecessors have been assisted in meeting the burdens of their office; and thus, in the exercise of their worldwide mission of charity, they have been able to extend help to those in need, thereby showing the concern of the universal Church for all humanity. For me then this is an hour of solemn gratitude.

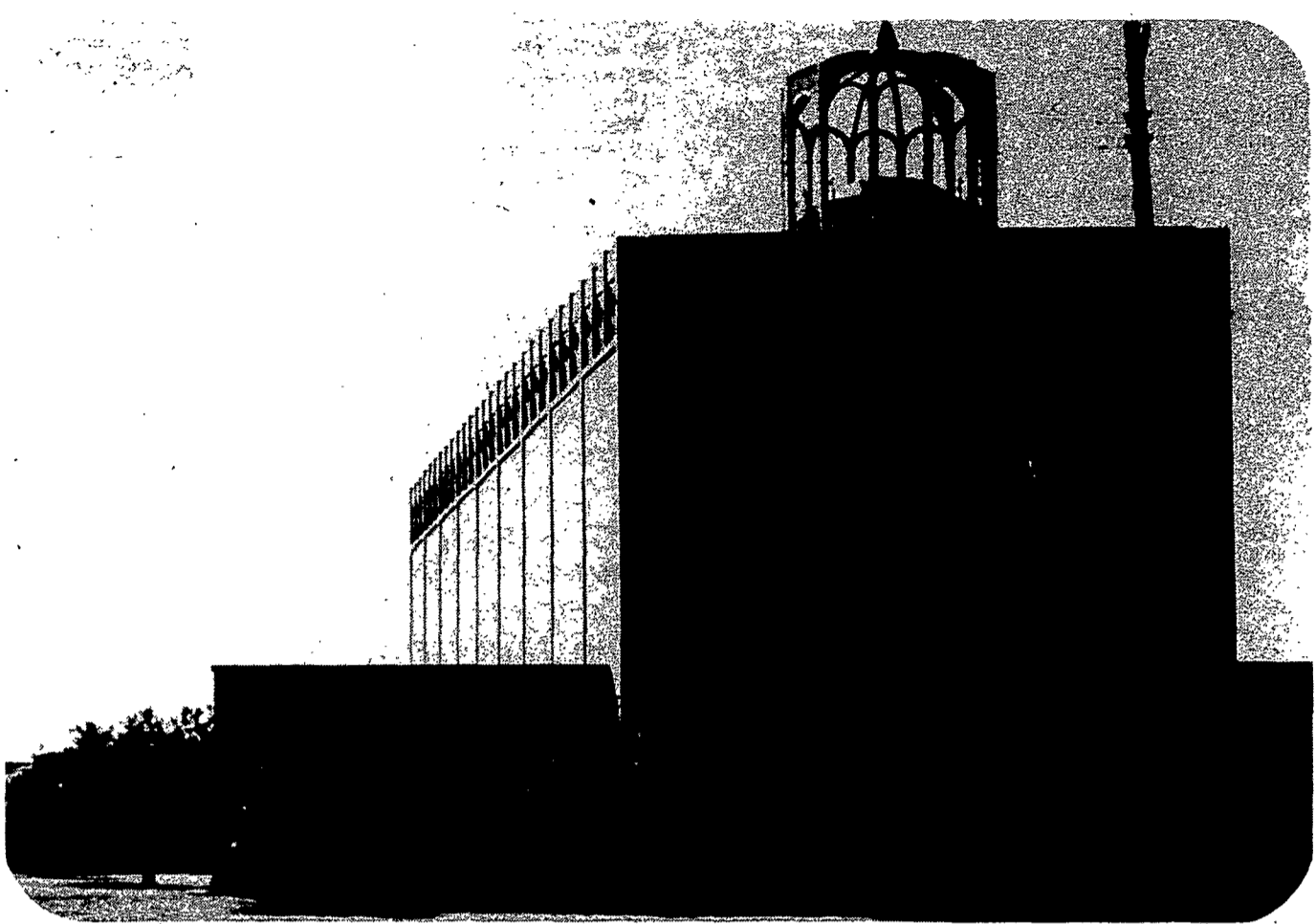
But even more, this is an hour of ecclesial communion and fraternal love. I come to you as a brother bishop: one who, like yourselves, has known the hopes and challenges of a local Church; one who has worked within the structures of a diocese, who has collaborated within the framework of an Episcopal Conference; one who has known the exhilarating experience of collegiality in an Ecumenical Council as exercised by

support you in your individual and joint pastoral activities by encouraging you to stand fast in the holiness and truth of our Lord Jesus Christ. And in you I desire to honor Jesus Christ, the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls (cf. 1 Pt 2:25).

Because we have been called to be shepherds of the flock, we realize that we must present ourselves as humble servants of the Gospel. Our leadership will be effective only to the extent that our own discipleship is genuine - to the extent that the Beatitudes have become the inspiration of our lives, to the extent that our people really find in us the kindness, simplicity of life and universal charity that they expect.

We who, by divine mandate, must proclaim the duties of the Christian law, and who must call our people to constant conversion and renewal, know that Saint Paul's invitation applies above all to ourselves: "You must put on the new man created in God's image, whose justice and holiness are born of truth" (Eph 4:24).

The holiness of personal conversion is indeed the condition for our fruitful ministry as Bishops of the Church. It is our union with Jesus Christ that determines the credibility of our witness to the Gospel and the supernatural effectiveness of our activity. We can convincingly proclaim "the unsearchable riches of Christ" only if we maintain fidelity to the love and friendship of Jesus, only if we continue to live in the faith of the Son of God.



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God has given a great gift to the American Hierarchy in recent years: the canonization of John Neumann. An American Bishop is officially held up by the Catholic Church to be an exemplary servant of the Gospel and shepherd of God's people, above all because of his great love of Christ. On the occasion of the canonization, Paul VI asked: "What is the meaning of this extraordinary event, the meaning of this canonization?" And he answered, saying: "It is the celebration of holiness". And this holiness of Saint John Neumann was expressed in brotherly love, in pastoral charity, and in zealous service by one who was the bishop of a diocese and an authentic disciple of Christ.

During the canonization, Paul VI went on to say: "Our ceremony today is indeed the celebration of holiness. At the same time, it is a prophetic anticipation - for the Church, for the United States, for the world - of a renewal of love: love for God, love for neighbor". As bishops, we are called to exercise in the Church this prophetic role of love and, therefore, of holiness.

Guided by the Holy Spirit, we must all be deeply convinced that holiness is the first

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priority in our lives and in our ministry. In this context, as Bishops we see the immense value of prayer: The liturgical prayer of the Church, our prayer together, our prayer alone. In recent times many of you have found that the practice of making spiritual retreats together with your brother Bishops is indeed a help to that holiness born of truth. May God sustain you in this initiative so that each of you, and all of you together, may fulfill your role as a sign of holiness offered to God's people on their pilgrimage to

the Father. May you yourselves, like Saint John Neumann, also be a prophetic anticipation of holiness. The people need to have bishops whom they can look upon as leaders in the quest for holiness - bishops who are trying to anticipate prophetically in their own lives the attainment of the goal to which they are leading the faithful.

Saint Paul points out the relationship of justice and holiness to truth Jesus himself, in his priestly prayer, asks his Father to consecrate his disciples by means of truth; and he adds: "Your word is truth." And he goes on to say that he consecrates himself for the sake of the disciples, so that they themselves may be consecrated in truth. Jesus consecrated himself so that the disciples might be consecrated, set apart, by the communication of what he was: the Truth. Jesus tells his Father: "I gave them your word" - "Your word is truth."

The holy word of God, which is truth, is communicated by Jesus to his disciples. This word is entrusted as a sacred deposit to his Church, but only after he had implanted in his Church, through the power of the Holy Spirit, a special charism

to guard and transmit intact the word of God.

With great wisdom, John XXIII convoked the Second Vatican Council. Reading the signs of the times, he knew that what was needed a council of a pastoral nature, a council that would reflect the great pastoral love and care of Jesus Christ the Good Shepherd for his people. But he knew that a pastoral council - to be genuinely effective - would need a strong doctrinal basis. And precisely for this reason, precisely

because the word of God is the only basis for every pastoral initiative, John XXIII on the opening day of the Council - Oct. 11, 1962 - made the following statement: "The greatest concern of the Ecumenical Council is this: that the sacred deposit of Christian doctrine should be more effectively guarded and taught."

This explains Pope John's inspiration; this is what the new Pentecost was to be: this is why the Bishops of the Church - in the greatest manifestation of collegiality in

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the history of the world - were called together: "so that the sacred deposit of Christian doctrine should be more effectively guarded and taught."

In our time, Jesus was consecrating anew his disciples by truth; and he was doing it by means of an Ecumenical Council: he was transmitting by the power of the Holy Spirit his Father's word to new generations. And, what John XXIII considered to be the aim of the Council, I consider as the aim of this post conciliar period.

For this reason, in my first meeting last November with American Bishops on their ad limina visit I stated: "This then is my own deepest hope today for the pastors of the Church in America, as well as for all the pastors of the universal Church: that the sacred deposit of Christian doctrine should be more effectively guarded and taught". In the word of God is the salvation of the world. By means of the proclamation of the word of God, the Lord continues in his Church and through his Church to consecrate his disciples, communicating to them the truth that he himself is.

For this reason the Vatican Council emphasized the Bishop's role of announcing the full truth of the Gospel and proclaiming "the whole mystery of Christ". This teaching was constantly repeated by Paul VI for the edification of the universal Church. It was explicitly proclaimed by John Paul I on the very day he died and I too have frequently reaffirmed it in my own pontificate. And I am sure that my successors and your successors will hold this teaching until Christ comes again in glory.

Among the papers that

were left to me by Paul VI there is a letter written to him by a bishop, on the occasion of the latter's appointment to the episcopacy. It is a beautiful letter; and in the form of a resolution it includes a clear affirmation of the Bishop's role of guarding and teaching the deposit of Christian doctrine, of proclaiming the whole mystery of Christ. Because of the splendid insights that this letter offers, I would like to share part of it with you.

As he pledged himself to be loyal in obedience to Paul VI and to his successors, the Bishop wrote: "I am resolved:

"To be faithful and constant in proclaiming the Gospel of Christ;

"To maintain the content of faith, entire and uncorrupted, as handed down by the Apostles and professed by the Church at all times and places."

And then with equal insight, this bishop went on to tell Paul VI that, with the help of Almighty God, he was determined:

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