



WITH THE NEW MILLENNIUM

I am pleased to introduce you to a new document that reached me on the same evening as the closing of the Holy Year 2000. It is the Apostolic Letter *At the beginning of the New Millennium*, which Pope John Paul II signed January 6, 2001; that very evening the text was available on Internet! The letter is about thirty pages, and is both very interesting and compelling, satisfying, heartwarming and affirming. The Pope draws conclusions from the year 2000 Jubilee, a year which was for him and for countless other Christians, an intense spiritual experience. Pope John Paul now feels ready to encourage the whole world to "put out into the deep" and face the future with courage and confidence. He repeats the words of Christ to Peter, « *Duc in altum* », "Put out into the deep," words which were often used as a graduating class motto. You can read the full text of the Letter on our website at « diocese-edmundston.ca ».

A MEMORABLE LETTER

I have read and reread the letter: it is as if the Holy Father were sharing his innermost thoughts, a personal meditation on Christ Jesus, a Spirit-filled pastoral program, inspiration not only for the coming months but also for years and centuries to come! The letter is divided into four chapters, with an overriding theme: Christ. The first chapter, *Meeting Christ, the Legacy of the Great Jubilee*, is a memorial. The Pope recapitulates the Jubilee Year's events not to make a thorough evaluation but rather for the purpose of addressing a hymn of praise to the Most Holy Trinity. Just as he had prayed that the Holy Year 2000 would be an continuing hymn to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, he now continues his prayer of praise and thanksgiving. He also interprets the messages which the Spirit of God addressed the Church during this year of grace. In this way are recalled a number of significant events of the year 2000: the ecumenical celebrations, begging forgiveness, or what the Pope calls "the purification of memory", his pilgrimage to Mount Sinai and the Holy Land, his many meetings with various people: children, travellers, the handicapped, artists, women, politicians, catechists, priests, bishops, etc. Special reference is made to young people: the World Days of Youth brought together the greatest number of people in the history of Rome. Beyond the visible events, the Great Jubilee is judged by the Pope as more specially an event of grace which hopefully will have touched countless lives, leading them along the path of conversion. The Letter's title summarises very well the conclusion which the Pope arrives at: a renewed encounter with Christ is the true legacy of the Jubilee, a legacy we must treasure and invest in for the future.

A FACE TO CONTEMPLATE

The second chapter, titled *A Face to Contemplate* has a strong contemplative thread running through it. Before looking to the future in immediately-operational terms, the Pope calls on the Church not to abandon the contemplation of Christ's mystery, but rather to deepen it while keeping one's eyes fixed on the Lord's face. A song I composed last year comes to my mind. It was called "Let Us Engage the Battle for God, Our Eyes Fixed on Jesus Christ": it appears to me that this contemplation helps us constantly discover the basic features of Jesus and his essential Gospel message. The Pope sees the mystery in its broad details. The Letter is not meant to be a doctrinal treatise, but rather a way of repeating again Peter's exclamation at the time of his profession of faith at Caesaria Philippi: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God". I believe that the Pope shared with us part of his own spiritual experience. I recall that at Québec on September 9, 1984, he had shared with us this profession of faith which is set within the context of contemplation of the face of Christ in the depths of his divine and human mystery.

STARTING AFRESH FROM CHRIST

The third chapter begins with a call to the local Churches, inviting them to intensify their pastoral programmes according to different context requirements. The Pope's intention is not to draw one pastoral plan for the entire Church: all he does is indicate some pressing issues and priorities. He insists on the need to direct the pastoral task in the direction of a strong experience of faith which is conducive to holiness. By proposing such an ideal to all the faithful, he reiterates the primacy of prayer, personal prayer but especially the communal prayer of the liturgy. The Pope urges us to rediscover the meaning of Sunday, the weekly Easter, so as to make of the Eucharist the heart of the day. After insisting on the sacrament of the reconciliation, the Pope reminds all of the supreme importance of listening to and proclaiming the Word. The new evangelisation remains more urgent than ever.

WITNESSES TO LOVE

The final chapter deals with pastoral programming under the aspects of communion, charity, and witness in the world. There are in the Church areas and places of communion: care must be taken to maintain them and affirm them. The Pope names a few: synods, bishops' conferences, priests' senates, pastoral councils. These instruments would be lifeless without a spirituality of communion, that is, without the capacity to see communion as a gift from above and without living it in terms of brotherly relations, in esteem and welcome of mutual gifts. In this regard, the Pope refers to the Hymn of Charity: If I have no love, I am nothing! What profit would there be to be on this council, that committee, this organisation, if I lack charity? Fraternal charity is the great challenge of pastoral ministry: it is by this sign that we are recognized as disciples of Jesus. The Pope notes the many challenges facing the Church and inciting her to be the concrete expression of God's love in situations of suffering and need. The final section refers to the courageous witness that Christians are called to give in all sectors of social and cultural life, especially where the presence of evangelical leaven is especially needed: in questions of life and the preservation of life, in problems created by the ecological fiasco, and in private scientific experimentation of an ethical nature. The ecumenical and interreligious dialogue remains an inescapable priority.

« DUC IN ALTUM »

The letter concludes as it started, by recalling Jesus' invitation to Peter, in the episode of the miraculous catch: « *Duc in altum!* » The Holy Door is closed, but « the living door », Christ Jesus whom it symbolizes, remains more than ever open. It is not to the drabness of daily living that the Church returns, after the enthusiasm of the Jubilee. Quite the opposite: a new apostolic impetus awaits us, one which is animated and sustained by confidence in the presence of Christ and with the strength of the Holy Spirit.

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