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Message of His Holiness

Pope Paul VI

to the
Cardinals, Archbishops and Bishops
of the United States
on the Occasion of the

United States Bicentennial

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MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS

POPE PAUL VI

TO THE CARDINALS, ARCHBISHOPS and BISHOPS OF THE
UNITED STATES

ON THE OCCASION OF THE OBSERVANCE
OF THE UNITED STATES BICENTENNIAL

To Our Venerable Brothers
the Cardinals, Archbishops, Bishops,
and to all the Ordinaries of the United States of America

As we celebrate the Solemnity of Pentecost and commemorate the sanctifying and unifying mission of the Holy Spirit in the Church, we turn our thoughts to you our beloved Brethren in the Episcopate called together with us to the pastoral service of God's people in the United States. Since it is by the power of the Holy Spirit that the unity of the Church's fellowship and ministry is brought about (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 4), we are happy at this time to extol the hierarchical communion that binds us together. We are one in Christ Jesus, one in his priesthood, one in the preaching of his word, one in the service of his people. And in the Holy Spirit, through Jesus Christ, we are one in his love for the Father.

Ecclesial communion is for us a cause of immense joy and a source of pastoral strength. We wish to share with you this joy and this strength, opening our heart to you, and through you to the beloved clergy, Religious and laity of all Rites in America. In this year that marks the Bicentennial of your nation we ask the Holy Spirit to come upon you, to bring to completion and fruitfulness the works that have been begun among you with great generosity, sacrifice and love. To his powerful action we entrust you with a solemn exhortation: "Do all you can to preserve the unity of the Spirit by the peace that binds you together" (Eph 4:3).

There are many considerations we would like to share with you and it is not possible to touch upon all of them in this letter. But, as Successor of Peter, we are writing in order to confirm you in your faith in Jesus Christ the Son of the living God, and to confirm you in the ministry you exercise in his name for the building up of his Church in faith, hope and love.

We had occasion to speak to those of you who were assembled last year in Rome, and through you to send our message back to the entire Hierarchy. We wish now to repeat the sentiments expressed on that occasion, sentiments of deep affection in the Lord, and of profound gratitude for your sharing with us in the ministry of the Gospel. At numerous other times we have spoken with you individually and in groups. We have expressed joy in our meetings with you: during your *ad limina* visits we have celebrated together our ecclesial communion. Some of our encounters have been brief, others protracted, but all of them have been full of significance in the love of Christ and the Church. With special thanksgiving to God we shall always recall two special moments when our ecclesial communion found its highest expression in the Eucharist: we were together in the Sistine Chapel, on September 22, 1974 and once again in Saint Peter's Square, on September 14, 1975 under the banner and aegis of an American woman, Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton.

The motives for our fraternal affection in the Lord are many. We have known your work, your toil, your labor of love on behalf of the Gospel (cf. 1 Thess 1:3). We have known your dedication to the Church, your loyalty to our predecessors and to ourself in this See of Peter. We have known also the goodness of your people and their sustained piety and generosity. We are witness personally to the immense good accomplished by Catholic Relief Services over the years and we know the zeal and love generated in your people for the cause of the missions and for Peter's Pence. We know also of a multiplicity of other works done in the name of Jesus and for the glory of his name, among which we would mention explicitly the Campaign for Human Development. Your Christian sensitivity and pastoral concern have brought honor to your local Churches. And, as on other occasions, in the name of the poor and of those who have benefited from your fraternal love, we express gratitude to you and to all your fellow-citizens—gratitude to America.

We are one with you in all your many efforts to help bring about renewal. And today in the plenitude of Christ's charity we exhort you to continue faithfully and laboriously the good work begun. United with your clergy, your Religious and laity—as a single people, in communion with the entire Church of God—go forward along the path of spiritual renewal and reconciliation—along the path of the Second Vatican Council, for its full application in every sphere. All your efforts will likewise constitute a hymn of thanksgiving to the Holy Spirit whose action has brought such a great blessing to Christ's Church in our day.

In a word, what we view as the aim to be achieved is, without doubt, increased holiness of life—holiness that will be manifested at every level of the Church and will be a witness to society.

We ask that everyone should assume the part that is his or hers. To priests, your conscientious collaborators of the presbyteral order and sharers in your responsibility, we lovingly recall the expression of the Acts of the Apostles: their priorities must be today and forever “in prayer and in the service of the word” (Acts 6:4). Deacons are to accomplish their ministry of service in the fullness of faith and of the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 6:5). May the laity be “light in the Lord” (Eph 5:8), giving a witness of good works before the world, and may the home be a stronghold of true conjugal love, of unity and of peace. In this regard we repeat what our predecessor Pius XII wrote to the American Bishops: “What can there be on earth more serene and joyful than the Christian family” (*Sertum Laetitiae*, November 1, 1939). We renew our solicitude for the full participation of women, in accordance with their role, in the life of the Church.

We pray for the young, that having been given the undiluted message of the Gospel they may lend their total energy, in the authenticity of love and discipline, to the building up of the Christian community. For the elderly we ask respect and reverence. For all the various component groups of your society we ask the determination to work in unity—so “that the world may believe” (Jn 17:21).

A role of special ecclesial service is occupied by the Religious. This role in turn is but the manifestation of a state of consecrated and generous love of Christ and his Church. As we extol anew the value of this consecration, we recall a conviction of our

predecessor Pius XII, who used to say—we heard him often—that the strength of the Church in America was in the Catholic schools and that the strength of the schools was in the Religious—in their consecrated ecclesial love. We willingly attest again to the importance of the contemplative vocation, in which Christ Jesus intimately associates Religious in his eternal praise of the Father. We are not unmindful of the large number of other particular apostolates exercised by Religious for the love of Christ and his brethren. Among these a place of honor is held by those who have understood the Lord's concern for the sick and suffering and who lovingly minister to them in his name. To all the Religious we earnestly present again the Gospel ideals as expressed in *Evangelica Testificatio*.

We have supreme pastoral solicitude for the future of your seminaries and we repeat to you what we said last year to a group of Rectors of Major Seminaries: “. . . we rely on your devoted collaboration, so that our beloved seminaries may be always houses of deep faith and authentic Christian asceticism, as well as joyful communities sustained by Eucharistic piety” (Discourse, April 16, 1975).

The inheritance of the Holy Year to the entire Church is one of Evangelization. With immense joy we have been assured that you are committed with increased energy to this goal. Within this context we pray that the Church in the United States will generously keep alive the missionary spirit, and indeed “intensify it in the moment of history in which we are living” (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 53). May the priestly and religious vocations, which we beseech the Lord to multiply in your midst, also include an increase of selfless missionaries who will help this generation to carry out Christ's command “to make disciples of all nations” (Mt. 28:19). In this regard we cannot emphasize too forcefully the teaching of the Second Vatican Council wherein the Eucharist is presented as “the source and summit of all evangelization” (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 5), as well as “the source and summit of all Christian life” (*Lumen Gentium*, 11).

The true Christian spirit that must animate your people has today and always its primary and indispensable source in their active participation in the Eucharistic Sacrifice and in the entire liturgical life of the Church (cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 10, 14). We ask that your people be constantly invited to a deeper reali-

zation of the centrality of the Eucharist in their lives and of their need to participate therein. This is indeed an important emphasis, especially in a year in which the Eucharistic Congress marks the special passage of the Lord among your people.

We exhort all our sons and daughters to a profound sense of reverence for the Eucharistic mystery, and above all we lovingly remind all the priests who are called to act in the person of Christ of their special duty: *sancta sancte tractanda*. The very holiness of God, of Jesus Christ—*Tu solus sanctus . . . Jesu Christe*—demands deep reverence and profound respect.

We are pleased to recall that the Holy See has authorized, under certain circumstances, the distribution of Holy Communion by extraordinary ministers duly deputed to this high task. But we wish to emphasize that this ministry remains an extraordinary ministry to be exercised in accordance with the precise norms of the Holy See. By its nature therefore the role of the extraordinary minister is different from those other roles of Eucharistic participation that are the ordinary expression of lay participation.

As we have already told the President of your Episcopal Conference, we have deeply at heart the renewed discipline of the Sacrament of Penance or of Reconciliation. We pray that the element of spiritual conversion, so necessary for this Sacrament, will play a great role in the life of your people and that they will never lose a sense of sin and therefore of the need for confession and forgiveness. We ask for supreme vigilance in the question of auricular confession: that it may be held in honor by all, and that its fervent and frequent use may be promoted with pastoral conviction and zeal.

In pursuing the cause of evangelization we are all mindful of the preeminence of God's word. The message that we preach is Christ. What we proclaim to the world is that the summit of wisdom and the "power of God" (1 Cor 1:18) is the mystery of Christ's Cross. With Saint Paul, once again we charge each of you "to preach the word, to stay with the task whether convenient or inconvenient—correcting, reproving, appealing—constantly teaching and never losing patience" (2 Tim 4:2). And to each of you we say: "Be steady and self-possessed: put up with hardships, perform your work as an evangelist, fulfill your ministry" (2 Tim

4:5). Brethren, these are the highest priorities of your activities as Bishops of the Church of God.

Intimately linked with progress in evangelization is the need for prayer. We are confident that you yourselves will be exemplars in this regard and encourage prayer among your people, especially family prayer. May meditation on the word of God spread among your people.

We are grateful for the pastoral concern that you have shown in the field of catechetics. This sphere is so important as to constitute the matter for the next Synod of Bishops. The future of the Church depends on the wisdom and zeal shown in catechetics. The world says to us today precisely what a group of individuals recorded in the Gospel once said to the Apostle Philip: "We wish to see Jesus" (Jn 12:21). And it is Jesus that we must show to the world—Jesus and no substitute. Hence, Venerable Brothers, we exhort you to the utmost vigilance in the matter of catechetical content, as you endeavor to point out to children and adults the Way, the Truth, and the Life, who is Christ.

We are deeply appreciative of your constant solicitude in bringing the application of Christ's message into the lives of your people. We know your commitment to the social teaching of the Church in various fields. We thank you for promoting liberty and justice and for your concern with the many needs of your people: for food and housing, for health assistance, employment and education—your preoccupation for farm labor, for the condition of migrants, for the dignity of immigrants and for the promotion of peace through endeavors favoring development.

We would confirm you in this pastoral solicitude offered in the name of Christ. And we would likewise recall to you that your endeavors must be incessantly renewed in the application of the uplifting message of the Gospel. Each day constitutes a new beginning in our service of Christ in our people. At the same time as we strive to uplift them, we must proclaim the mystery of the Beatitudes—the plan of Christ for the happiness of the world. It will never be possible to anticipate fully the Kingdom of God, to eliminate completely the consequences of sin, or to eradicate totally the injustice of men. With the balance of the Gospel and in the love of Christ, we must still teach our people that

“one thing only is required” (cf. Lk 10:42). We must still speak to them of “other higher needs” (Address at Tondo, in the Philippines, November 29, 1970).

Of immense importance is the question of Catholic education. We know that you and all your predecessors have expended great effort in this field. The repeated concern for Catholic education expressed by the many Councils of Baltimore is but one glorious chapter in your history. We renew the plea we made last year and which you took so magnanimously to heart: “Brethren, we know the difficulties involved in preserving Catholic schools, and the uncertainties of the future. And yet we rely on the help of God and on your own zealous collaboration and untiring efforts, so that Catholic schools can continue, despite grave obstacles, to fulfill their providential role at the service of genuine Catholic education, and at the service of your country” (Address, September 15, 1975). We pray that the ideal that inspired so many teachers—priests, brothers, sisters and lay people—will continue to be the goal of Catholic education: *donec formetur Christus in vobis* (Gal. 4:19):

We thank you for the efforts with which as a Hierarchy you have sustained the cause of the Catholic University of America. We pray that this institution and all the Catholic institutions of higher learning in your country will be proud of their Catholic heritage, and maintain an institutional commitment to the message of Christ as proclaimed by the Catholic Church. We hope that these institutions will always offer courses of high value where the wisdom of God will clarify and elevate limited human reasoning, and where the word of God and the magisterium of the Church will be held in honor.

We express gratitude to all who dedicate their intellectual talents to the Church. We are thinking of all those who spend long hours in research and study at the service of God’s word, at the service of truth.

As we have had the occasion to express in private audiences, we ask that the heritage of Latin be revived and sedulously pursued in the seminaries.

Of special interest to us is the use of the mass media. We have repeatedly spoken about them and our thoughts are widely

known. But the field has such importance and such ramifications in life that we wish to stress again the viewpoint of the Church: "The Church's aim in the employment of the mass media is then crystal clear: to preach effectively Jesus Christ, the way, the truth and the life (cf. Jn 14:6), and following his example to perform a ministry of service in the midst of the world" (Message to Pan Asian Meeting of Episcopal Commissions for Social Communications, August 1-3, 1974). We ask that all the means of social communication at the service of the Church be inspired by this goal. We place special hope in the diocesan press.

Through the proper use of the mass media the Catholics in America can also make an increased contribution to their fellow-citizens. The enunciation of moral principles and the inculcation of fraternal love and support that know no ethnic limitations can greatly assist the entire country as it faces obstacles to its moral greatness, continued progress and worldwide mission. We are glad that real progress in good will and charity has indeed been made in combatting discrimination of various kinds, especially racial discrimination. At the same time we are confident that these sincere efforts will continue and be intensified. We assure you moreover that we are one with you and all American citizens of good will in facing the special dangers to your country and society from abortion and euthanasia. Besides, we would repeat with insistence: "The rights of minorities call out for protection as do the rights of the poor, the handicapped, the incurably ill and all those who live at the margin of society and are without voice. Above all the precious right to life . . . must be affirmed anew . . ." (Address to the President and Members of the United Nations Special Committee on Apartheid, May 22, 1974).

Also of great importance are the endeavors to control narcotic abuse wherever it is found. We would earnestly reiterate the "hope that the immense forces of good would exert pressure against the unworthy activities of those who are greatly responsible for the corruption of youth" (Message on the occasion of the North American Congress on Alcohol and Drug Problems, December 12-18, 1974). We know likewise of your efforts to fortify your people against the materialism and hedonism that menace all sectors of society. A short time ago we spoke to a group of legislators of your land, saying: "At every turn, your Bicentennial speaks to you of moral principles, religious convictions, inalienable rights given

by the Creator" (Address, April 28, 1976). If all Catholics and people of good will were united in "those sound moral principles formulated by your Founding Fathers and enshrined forever in your history," what a beacon of light America would be for the world!

We are deeply pleased to see the continuing efforts being made in the field of ecumenism. We reiterate the profound conviction already expressed to you Bishops "that conversion of heart and holiness of life, along with public and private prayer for unity of Christians, should be regarded as the soul of the whole ecumenical movement and can rightly be called 'spiritual ecumenism'" (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, 8; cf. Address, September 15, 1975). One of the fruits of ecumenism will be a united service to humanity in the name of Jesus.

Our thoughts turn to all your beloved people—especially to those who suffer physical and mental anguish. We pray that the rising generation will know how to bring understanding and love into the world and accept the Christian discipline necessary for them to fulfill their mission of compassion.

We are confident in the power of Christ's Resurrection to sustain you all in his love and in the joyful hope of his coming. As we confirm the value of sacrifice and effort—and especially the enormous value of contemplative love and of suffering endured in union with the Sacrifice of Jesus for the salvation of the world—we exhort you again to that victory which overcomes the world: faith in Jesus Christ the Son of God (1 Jn 5:5). Above all, Brethren, let us love, because love binds the other virtues together and makes them perfect (cf. Col. 3:14).

Finally, with great affection, we commend you all to the intercession of the Immaculate Virgin Mary, Patroness of the United States, and entrust the destiny of your ministry to her maternal care. We invoke upon you the heavenly assistance of Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini, Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton and Blessed John Neumann.

And in this way, Brethren, let us go forward—forward together, in the name of the Lord, in the name of Jesus. It is he who tells us: "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Have faith in God and faith in me" (Jn 14:1).

With God's grace there is no hardship we cannot endure, no difficulty we cannot sustain, no obstacle we cannot overcome for the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ and for the glory of his name. In this name, Brethren—in the holy name of Jesus—we impart to you and to all our sons and daughters in America our special Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, the Solemnity of Pentecost, June 6, 1976

Paulus P P. VI

