



To the Knights of Columbus

In the joy of the Great Jubilee, I greet the Supreme Council of the Knights of Columbus assembled in Boston for its 118th Annual Convention. In this year, as the whole Church sings the praises of the Most Holy Trinity for the gift of the Word made flesh, I give thanks for the many ways in which the faithful witness of the Knights has contributed to the building up of God's Kingdom and enabled the glory of the Blessed Trinity to shine forth more resplendently in the world. It is my hope that the Great Jubilee will be celebrated by all the Knights of Columbus as a welcome opportunity to share with others, in word and by the example of their lives, the great gift of life and salvation received in Jesus Christ (*cf. Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 16).

On this occasion, I cannot fail to express personally my gratitude for the praiseworthy service rendered by Supreme Knight Virgil Dechant during his twenty-three years of leadership in the highest office of your Order. In the discharge of his duties Mr. Dechant has never failed in the loyalty born of love, and he has brought his skills and experience to the service of both the Knights of Columbus and the Church as a whole. He has presided over a time of growth for the Knights — a growth measurable not only in membership and assets, but also in works of charity and in faithful service to the Holy See. Under his direction, the Knights have contributed greatly to the historic task of preparing Saint Peter's Basilica for the Great Jubilee and they have been most supportive of the Holy See's operations in the vital field of social com-

munications. As Supreme Knight, Mr. Dechant has also worked hard to ensure that the Order remains conspicuous in the defense of human life and in encouraging vocations to the priesthood. For him and his family, this has meant no little sacrifice; and I pray that now, as he prepares to lay down the burden of office, the God of all mercies will reward him richly for all that he has done in the service of Christ and his Church in these years of generous service.

In preparation for the Great Jubilee, the Special Assembly for America of the Synod of Bishops called the attention of all Catholics to the urgent need for a new evangelization and to the essential role which lay people and associations of the laity are called to assume in this great missionary enterprise (cf. *Eccelesia in America*, 44). In the effort to proclaim the Gospel in new ways in a changed world, lay Catholics have received, by the grace of their Baptism, the particular apostolate of bearing witness to Christ in society and imbuing the whole temporal order with the spirit of evangelical truth. The Knights of Columbus are rightly proud of their distinguished history as a Catholic fraternal association committed to the spiritual and material advancement of their members, and the support of the Church's mission at every level of ecclesial life. The challenges of the present moment and the vast horizons opened up by the new millennium now invite the Knights as individuals and as a body to ponder new and effective ways of witnessing to the Gospel and resisting the "culture of death" which threatens the lives of the most defenseless of our brothers and sisters, even as it denies the most fundamental truths about human dignity: the truth that every man and woman has been created in the image and likeness of God and is called to a transcendent destiny in Christ.

The new evangelization in fact requires an awakening of the sense of the beauty, the value and the immense possibilities for human life revealed in the

Incarnation of the Son of God as these are experienced ever anew in the encounter with the Risen Lord which takes place in the communion of his Church. The Great Jubilee can thus be seen as a joyful celebration of God's gracious offer of new life in the Incarnation of his Son, and of the genius and grandeur of our Christian vocation. It is my hope that the Knights' outstanding participation in the Church's lengthy program of spiritual preparation for the Jubilee will continue to bear fruit by fostering a firm commitment on the part of each Knight to grow in knowledge of the Catholic Faith and to lead an authentically Christian life marked by "a true longing for holiness, a deep desire for conversion and personal renewal in a context of ever more intense prayer and solidarity with our neighbors, especially the most needy" (*Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 32).

With great affection I invoke upon all the Knights of Columbus a fresh outpouring of divine grace for a spiritually fruitful celebration of the Jubilee. Commending the Knights and their families to the loving intercession of Mary, Mother of the Church, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of abundant grace and peace in our Lord Jesus Christ, "the first and the last, the beginning and the end" (*Rev 22:13*).

From the Vatican, July 8, 2000

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Joannes Paulus II". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a double underline at the end.