

# Keynote Talk

To Archbishop Justin Rigali, a dear friend of many years and a great shepherd in the Church, I express my thanks for the personal invitation to be with you today. It is a grace to be able to reflect with you on the life of the Church in a critical moment of our nation's history and indeed of the history of the world.

What happened eleven days ago, when terrorists struck, has seared itself into our memories. What happens now in our lives as people of faith is colored by those events, but it is not dictated by them.

I suggest today that, within the framework of Pope John Paul's Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, we now consider issues that face church and state—and our global society—in these days. In his letter, the Holy Father recalled and celebrated the events of the Jubilee Year. He singled several out for special mention.

One, which has proved so significant for our relations as Church with the world, was the public “request for forgiveness,” the day of pardon. This took place in the context of a moving celebration of the Eucharist in St. Peter's on March 12, 2000. It was a fulfillment of the recommendations of the Consistory of Cardinals that met in 1994 and laid the groundwork for the Apostolic Letter *Adveniente Tertio Millennio*. They asked that the Church look through history at the failures of her sons and daughters and confess them frankly. The Holy Father took his cue from this and arranged for prayers asking God's forgiveness for a variety of failings. Then he devoted his homily to reflections on this remarkable new page in the modern history of the Church.

And there was his unforgettable visit to the Western Wall in Jerusalem when he placed in it his prayer of earlier in the month for God's pardon for the failures of Christians in regard to the children of Abraham. When his hand touched the wall, he seemed to touch all the history and all the anguish of a people who had suffered much.

Then the Holy Father raises the challenge of holiness. He describes it as the “dimension which expresses best the mystery of the Church.” (No. 7) It is a

“message that convinces without the need for words” and “reveals the living reflection of the face of Christ.” Throughout his letter Pope John Paul returns again and again to this theme. As we remember the events of September 11, throwing in sharp relief what truly is important in our lives, we see reinforced the teaching of Jesus for our day: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for God’s righteousness....”

The Holy Father next recalls the joyous pilgrimage of 2.4 million young people to Rome last summer. As one who witnessed what transpired under a warm and unblinking sun, I say that their faith proved how alive God’s Spirit is in the hearts of the young Church.

Pope John Paul reflected also on the power of the Eucharist, recalling the great congress in Rome a year ago and on the ecumenical events, reflecting the insistent and growing hunger in the Christian family for the unity for which Jesus prayed for at the Last Supper. The sign of the unity we pray and work for will be unity around the table of the Lord, the Eucharist. (Here, logically, the Orthodox Churches, Oriental and Byzantine, hold out the greatest promise because they share the Catholic Faith in the early Creeds, the seven sacraments, and especially the Sacrament of Holy Orders, with the three orders of deacon, priest and bishop.)

The Holy Father also recalled his personal pilgrimage to the Holy Land as a “moment of brotherhood and peace, ...one of the most beautiful gifts of the whole Jubilee event.” He spoke of his “deeply felt desire for a just and prompt solution to the still unresolved problems of the Holy Places, cherished by Jews, Christians and Muslims together.” (No. 13)

,p>During his visit to Jerusalem, Pope John Paul met with Jewish, Christian and Muslim leaders to remind them all that each of their faiths held as basic oppos