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**Dedication of the shrine Matri Ecclesiae
Eucharistic Celebration - To be Sent Forth
Castel Gandolfo, September 9, 2004**

Readings:
Acts of the Apostles 2, 14-21
Luke 5, 1-11

With joy we are gathered around the altar to celebrate the Eucharist. With great happiness we wish to renew the New Covenant in the blood of Christ, since we just participated in an hour of grace with the successor of Peter, the rock upon which Christ built his Church. His words strengthened our faith. His testimony of life of the imitation of Christ, the good shepherd, and of his love of the Virgin Mary, brightens and sustains our own imitation of Christ. His acknowledgement of our movement and other ecclesiastical movements to consider them fruits of the Spirit and the Springtime of the Church, obliges us to cultivate a creative loyalty to the charism we have received and to collaborate with the Virgin Mary, filled with the hope to realize the mission of the Church at the rise of the dawn of new times.

With grateful hearts we praise the Father in heaven for the gift of the person and the magisterium of John Paul II and we ask him to illumine and strengthen him for his ministry. We likewise praise God because we are celebrating this Eucharist at the seat of the Focolare movement, the work of Mary. Their fraternal hospitality during these days and the bonds of unity that divine providence has knotted since the visit of Chiara at Schoenstatt in June of 1999, are a sign of gratitude and loyalty.

We also come with profound joy in our hearts at the gift of the dedication of the shrine Matri Ecclesiae that we celebrated yesterday. On the occasion of the 80th birthday of our founder on November 16, 1965, the international family wished to express its appreciation and childlike gratitude to him with this remarkable gift. This shrine will not be just one more shrine. With the symbolic cornerstone laying on December 8, 1965, at the conclusion of the Vatican council, its mission was to be linked to the animation and edification of the Church according to the spirit and the pastoral orientation of Vatican II. Since it is built in the visible center of the Church, it should likewise be a sign of the covenant of the Schoenstatt family with the pastor and father of the universal Church, and of the readiness of Schoenstatt to live and to earnestly strive to unfold the entire fruitfulness of the charism received so that the Church will be the soul of the world and of the cultures. Thirty-nine years have passed of a long waiting and arduous negotiations. With great hope and patient loyalty to the task that the founder entrusted to them, the institute of diocesan priests did their utmost to make this dream come true. Together with them many people and groups of our family have kept the flame aglow. To all of you our special thanks!

We possibly cannot forget the stirring words of our founder here in Rome on the day of the Immaculata when he proclaimed the greatness of this act that would occur on this chosen spot for the construction of the shrine. The prophet had his eyes fixed on the new image of the Church that the council Fathers had defined for the new times, detaching her from a static vision and portraying her as pilgrim Church, fraternal, moved by the Holy Spirit and filled with zeal to transform the world. From his place of silence in Milwaukee, he had attentively followed the sessions of the council and could observe that new features of this Church were emerging, a Church filled with life, listening with the freedom of the children of God to the Lord of history, attentive to the changing times, perceived and comprehended from God's vantage point. It is this Church whose features he wanted to be emulated by his family that God had given and entrusted unto him. He was surprised when this renewed Church began to receive the charism of Schoenstatt as a gift from God, liberating him from exile and accepting the movement as a powerful group with a promising future for the entire people of God.

Our founder had a clear vision of the Church for the day after tomorrow of the history and of the results of the great council, and in his heart he gave thanks for the communities which had emerged in Schoenstatt. Remembering his conventions and retreats, the fruits of the discernment of the signs and currents of the time which helped to renew the Church, and remembering the answer that he had discovered in those who have made the covenant of love in the shrine, he dared to say that nothing substantial of that which had emerged in the council, had not been already assumed by his family as an idea and as living experience, even before this episcopal assembly that was to be decisive for the history of the Church and for the fulfillment of her mission in the world. He regretted it, so to speak, that some members of the family perceived this mission without depth and lost its real dimensions from their sight. How often did he recommend us to immerse into the history of Schoenstatt so that we would discover and use it as compass to go forward into the newest times.

Therefore, at the end of his talk, he wanted to give to all those who were present at the time a remembrance of the act that would take place later on. The inscription he intended to write: "Remembrance of the symbolic laying of the corner stone for the shrine of the Mother Thrice Admirable in the shadow of St. Peter as sign of the incorporation and identification with the final act of Vatican II, and with the laying of the corner stone for the large church which Mother Church gives to the Mother of the Church. Rome, on the feast of the Immaculata 1965."

Years have passed. Many years have passed. United with Peter thinking of our particular churches and of ourselves, we ask: "Do we fully share our founder's love of the Church and of the Virgin Mary, his love of the family and of the time which God gave us as gift and task? Did we succeed already to enkindle the diocese where we live, the initiatives for evangelization in which we participate, the families we influence, the communities to which we belong, with that trust which Father Kentenich placed into the efficacy of the maternal love of the Virgin as a power capable of generating Christ in our hearts and in our time? Have the pastors and those who are consecrated placed their trust in the transforming power of Mary, Mother of the Church? Do they believe that she is capable of educating each one of us and the entire people of God, so that they become poor, humble and holy, open for the gifts of the Spirit just like on Pentecost, and do not rely on power, money, prestige but in conformity with the image of Mary, rely solely on her rock, completely on Christ, her spouse and Lord?"

In his talk on this memorable December 8, our founder compared the Church with a ship and with this image he described her without anchor, connected with the pier of the world beyond our time, navigating, steering into the sea, in the mist of waves and storms that threaten to shipwreck her.

This is a fitting image that reminds us of Jesus' encounter with his first disciples when they washed their nets on the seashore after they had spent the whole night without catching any fish. Without being aware of his own tiredness, Peter took him into his own boat. He went some distance off shore from where the master was teaching those who followed him. Peter's astonishment grew when he listened to the wisdom of Jesus and noticed the admiration of those who took his words to heart. Then Jesus invited him to steer into the sea and throw out his nets. Peter had many reasons why he would not go through the door which the Lord had opened. Who knew the sea better than he! Nevertheless, his confidence in the Lord was great. He agreed to go through the door which God opened. He would pass through it at the hand of the master. "In your name I will throw out the nets." The creative resultant did not let him wait. The boat almost sunk because of the many fish. But this was not all. The same morning the grace of God came upon an area which was prepared by the same Christ. Peter asked his brother Andrew and the sons of Zebedeo, his fishing companions to help him. The community between them grew. Simon Peter honestly recognized his condition as sinner. But then he accepted his vocation to be a fisher of people. Without wavering he left everything and followed Jesus ... until as bishop of this Church of Rome he was ready to die for him.

Duc in altum! These are also words of the Holy Father at the beginning of the third millennium because there are many who believe that they have spent day and night throwing out their nets without catching anything. He repeated Christ's invitation at the conclusion of the great Holy Year. He had met thousands of pilgrims who passed through the holy door, after having contemplated the countenance of Christ and the power of his grace in the hearts of the young, the workers, the families, the sick, the priests, in other words, all those who believe in him and feel chosen by him. Duc in altum at the start of this millennium of hope, capable of producing life in abundance and of making it fruitful! Duc in altum, a daring word that calls to accept Christ's invitation every time we find ourselves in front of a door that in his wisdom, he had opened for us! God wants that our time would encounter Christ and Mary in a profound way and also many of his disciples, of families and Christian communities who radiate forth the love, the peace and joy of the gospel.

The invitation to steer into the open sea is very appropriate for having been sent forth after the jubilee, and is an invitation directed to all the charisms and all the movements of the Church to develop the abundance of the gifts which they have received from the Holy Spirit and to collaborate with each other in an effective way. Thus the Holy Father asks us – like on this December 8, 1965 – that the life and gifts that God has given to our family, unite with the pastoral orientations which he and the council have entrusted to the whole Church so that she can throw her nets into the sea of the third millennium and bring about new miraculous catches of fish.

- The Holy Father asks us in our relation to God not to be content with superficial and temporary encounters but that we cross the sea of the third millennium, contemplating the countenance of Christ, of Christ in the glory, in the Eucharist and in our brothers and sisters (NMI 20f.) Let us steer into the open sea, doing everything we can to accept the voice of our founder who encourages us to live in admiration of the love and the presence of God in Jesus Christ, adoring his will, taking up his cross, encountering him in all the circumstances of our life and letting ourselves be guided by his providence with an heroic, childlike spirit.
- Our founder asks us in these new times to cultivate among us a profoundly fraternal attitude, and that the bishops and priests would be brothers and fathers who awaken co-responsibility. Duc in Altum! Would that this dream of the council could denote our family-like participation in Schoenstatt and in the Church! Let us pray and work to respond this way to the great challenge which the Holy Father suggested for the beginning of the new millennium. United with St. Vincent Pallotti, let us build -

with all the apostolic forces - the Church as home and school of the community just like the people of the new covenant (NMI 43f.) What a beautiful way to gain courage so that we can live the mission to be one in the heart of the Father in all its dimensions!

- Thinking of the vocation of the baptized and of the new times, the Holy Father has exhorted the entire Church not to be satisfied with a mediocre life but to place all the pastoral endeavors under the aspect of holiness (NMI 31). Thus he invites us to love in an heroic degree, to bring forth new generations of saints in the Church. Schoenstatt family, steer out into the sea! Don't be satisfied to treasure your personal ideals, the ideals of the course and of the family only for their pedagogical value. Our ideals are the pattern of personal and communal sanctity, they are God's promises of sanctity if we are docile to the actions of Mary from her shrines, from her, who went ahead of us the ways of providence and who is our mother and educator.
- The founder asked us to go through this world like the Virgin Mary, preparing the world for Christ and becoming similar to her in her love and fidelity to all her children, and in her preoccupation for the weak and the afflicted ones, for those who have neither wine nor hope. He suggested to us that we go through the world lavishly giving love, peace and joy. Also in this regard the Holy Father asks us to accelerate the rhythm of our crossing the sea: Duc in altum! Steer into the high sea! Throw out the nets of the covenant of love, declare your solidarity with all those who want to discover in the eyes, the heart and the hands of the other that active and concrete love for every human being, a love that distinguished the Virgin Mary as reflection and prolongation of the mercy, the imagination and strong love of Christ in solidarity with all (NMI 49f.). Thus each one of us should be a vital and attractive part of the gospel in the midst of the world – in our families and in the places of work and studies. Thus we are shaping the new cultures as spiritual areas open to love, to solidarity, to confidence and to life, as cultures of the covenant.

In virtue of this spiritual legacy, our shrine *Matri Ecclesiae* has received a symbolic quality of great relevance since our founder blessed its corner stone at the conclusion of the council. Here the two great streams of love of the founder and our family unite: *Dilexit Mariam* and *Dilexit Ecclesiam*. they unite like a gift, a mission and a promise, like a commission and promise of God to the whole family and to each one of us.

The soul of the council is reflected in these two streams of love which shape the fidelity of the Church to the Holy Spirit who inspired the council and the ardent longing of the Church to renew herself as faithful spouse of the Lord who contemplates and imitates the Virgin Mary, her mother and model, companion and permanent and official collaborator of Christ in the work of salvation.

But our shrine has to be much more than a symbol. How could the Blessed Virgin Mary act so close to the successor of Peter, stimulating the renewal of the church without being able to count on instruments? Thus in his talk on December 8, our founder asked with regards to Rome: "What significance does our little shrine have in the proximity, in the shadow of the basilica of St. Peter? Later we want to collaborate in Rome and also from here, to realize the post conciliar mission of the Church."

Thus our shrine will always be an invitation to live the *Cor unum in patre*, with the open heart of St. Paul who set out into the entire world. And thus this motto unites the love of God the Father with the love of our founder, coming forth from the fourth milestone of our history. It likewise indicates how fruitful the confluence will be of the life stream that flows forth from the covenant of love with our founder with that stream which buds forth from the covenant of love of the entire Church with the one who is her father and universal pastor. The love of the Holy Father pulsates in the heart of our founder: love for his person

and his mission. These dimensions of our covenant are also a gift and a task, especially at the beginning of the third millennium.

Let us conclude this meditation. We want to be conscious of having been sent and encouraged by the Holy Father to steer into the sea, and want to use effectively the treasure we have received. We do so with the help of the Blessed Mary, our Mother, Queen and Victress thrice Admirable, filled with joy and hope, sure of the victory. Amen.