

**EXTRAORDINARY MEETING BETWEEN THE CARDINALS OF THE UNITED STATES  
(SALA BOLOGNA DEL PALAZZO APOSTOLICO VATICANO, 23-24 APRIL 2002)**

**MESSAGE TO THE PRIESTS  
OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

We, the Cardinals of the United States and the Presidency of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, gathered with our brother Cardinals of the Roman Curia around the Successor of Peter, wish to speak a special word to you, our brother priests who give yourselves so generously from day to day in service of God's people.

At our meeting, you have been very much in our minds and hearts, for we know the heavy burden of sorrow and shame that you are bearing because some have betrayed the grace of Ordination by abusing those entrusted to their care.

We regret that episcopal oversight has not been able to preserve the Church from this scandal. The entire Church, the Bride of Christ, is afflicted by this wound - the victims and their families first of all, but also you who have dedicated your lives to "the priestly service of the Gospel of God" (Rom 15:16).

To all of you we express our deep gratitude for all that you do to build up the Body of Christ in holiness and love. We pledge to support you in every possible way through these troubled times, and we ask that you stay close to us in the bond of the priesthood as we make every effort to bring the healing grace of Christ to the people whom we serve.

We are in complete harmony with the Holy Father when he said in his Address yesterday: "Neither should we forget the immense spiritual, human and social good that the vast majority of priests and religious in the United States have done and are still doing.... To the Catholic communities in the United States, to their Pastors and members, to the men and women religious, to teachers in Catholic universities and schools, to American missionaries in all parts of the world, go the wholehearted thanks of the entire Catholic Church and the personal thanks of the Bishop of Rome".

As we look to the future, let us together beg the eternal High Priest for the grace to live this time of trial with courage and confidence in the Crucified Lord. This echoes the summons of our Ordination: "Imitate the mystery you celebrate; model your life on the mystery of the Lord's Cross" (Rite of Ordination); and it is a vital part of what we now offer the Church as she passes through this time of painful purification. From the house of the Successor of Peter, who has confirmed us in our faith, we wish in turn to confirm you in the humble and exalted service of the Catholic priesthood to which we have been called. Peace be with you!