



# The Holy See

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## APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, MEXICO AND THE BAHAMAS

### EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION

#### ***HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II***

*Mexico, Basilica of Guadalupe*

*Saturday, 27 January 1979* Hail Mary!1. Dear Brothers in the episcopate and dear sons and daughters, how deep is my joy that the first steps of my pilgrimage, as Successor of Paul VI and John Paul I, bring me precisely here. They bring me to you, Mary, in this shrine of the people of Mexico and of the whole of Latin America, the shrine in which for so many centuries your motherhood has been manifested. Hail Mary! It is with immense love and reverence that I utter these words, words so simple and at the same time so marvellous. No one will ever be able to greet you in a more wonderful way than the way in which the Archangel once greeted you at the moment of the Annunciation. Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. I repeat these words, words that so many hearts ponder upon and so many lips utter throughout the world. We here present utter them together, and we are aware that these are the words with which God himself, through his messenger, greeted you, the woman promised in the Garden of Eden, chosen from eternity as the Mother of the Word, the Mother of Divine Wisdom, the Mother of the Son of God. Hail, Mother of God!2. Your Son Jesus Christ is our Redeemer and Lord. He is our Teacher. All of us gathered here are his disciples. We are the Successors of the Apostles, of those to whom the Lord said: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age." (Mt 28:19-20). Gathered here together, the Successor of Peter and the successors of the Apostles, we ponder on how admirably these words have been fulfilled in this land. In fact, scarcely twenty years after the work of evangelization was begun in the New World in 1492, the Faith reached Mexico. Soon afterwards, the first archiepiscopal see was established, presided over by Juan de Zumárraga, supported by other great evangelizers, who were to extend Christianity over very wide areas. No less glorious religious epics were to be written in the Southern Hemisphere by men such as Saint Turibius of Mogroviejo and a long list of others who would deserve to be mentioned here at length. The paths of the Faith steadily stretched further, until at the end of the first century of evangelization the episcopal sees numbered more than seventy, with some four million Christians. This singular undertaking was to continue for a long time, until today, after five centuries of evangelization, it embraces almost a half of the entire Catholic church, which has struck root in the culture of the people of Latin America and forms part of their own identity. And with the achievement in these lands of Christ's mandate, with the multiplication everywhere of the children of divine adoption

through the grace of baptism, the Mother appeared too. In fact, the Son of God, and your Son, from the Cross indicated a man to you, Mary, and said: "Behold, your son" (Jn 19:26). And in that man he entrusted to you every person, he entrusted everyone to you. And you, who at the moment of the Annunciation, concentrated the whole programme of your life in those simple words: "Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38), embrace everyone, draw close to everyone, seek everyone out with motherly care. Thus is accomplished what the last Council said about your presence in the mystery of Christ and the Church. In a wonderful way you are always found in the mystery of Christ, your only Son, because you are present wherever men and women, his brothers and sisters, are present, wherever the Church is present. In fact, when the first missionaries who reached America from lands of eminent Marian tradition taught the rudiments of Christian faith, they also taught love for you, the Mother of Jesus and of all people. And ever since the time that the Indian Juan Diego spoke of the sweet Lady of Tepeyac, you, Mother of Guadalupe, have entered decisively into the Christian life of the people of Mexico. No less has been your presence in other places, where your children invoke you with tender names, as Our Lady of Altigracia, of the Aparecida, of Luján, and with many other no less affectionate names, not to give an unending list—names by which in each nation and even in each region the peoples of Latin America express their most profound devotion to you, and under which you protect them in their pilgrimage of faith. The Pope—who comes from a country in which your images, especially one, that of Jasna Gora, are also a sign of your presence in the nation's life and its hazardous history—is particularly sensitive to this sign of your presence here, in the life of the People of God in Mexico, in its history, a history which has also been not easy, and at times even dramatic. But you are also equally present in the life of the many other peoples of Latin America, presiding over and guiding not only their past, whether remote or recent, but also the present moment, with its uncertainties and shadows. The Pope perceives in the depths of his heart the special bonds that link you with this people and this people with you. This people, that gives you the affectionate name of *La Morenita*. This people, and indirectly the whole of this vast continent, lives its spiritual unity thanks to the fact that you are its Mother. A Mother who, through her love, creates, preserves and increases closeness between her children. Hail, Mother of Mexico!

Mother of Latin America!<sup>3</sup> We meet here at this exceptional and wonderful hour in the history of the world. We have come to this place, conscious that we are at a crucial moment. With this meeting of Bishops we wish to link ourselves with the previous Conference of the Latin-American Bishops that took place ten years ago at Medellín together with the Eucharistic Congress at Bogotá, which Pope Paul VI of indelible memory took part in. We have come here not so much to examine again, ten years later, the same problem, but rather to review it in a new way, at a new place, and at a new moment of history. We wish to take as our point of departure what is contained in the documents and resolutions of that Conference. And at the same time we wish, on the basis of the experiences of the last ten years and of the development of thought and in the light of the experiences of the whole Church, to take a correct and necessary step forward. The Medellín Conference took place shortly after the close of Vatican II, the Council of our century, and its objective was to take up again the Council's essential plans and content, in order to apply them and make them a directing force in the concrete situation of the Church in Latin America. Without the Council the Medellín meeting would not have been possible; that meeting was meant to be an impulse of spiritual renewal, a new "spirit" in the face of the future in full ecclesial fidelity in interpreting the signs of the times in Latin America. The evangelizing intention was quite clear. It is obvious in the sixteen themes dealt with, grouped about three great mutually complementary topics, namely human advancement, evangelization and growth in faith, and the visible Church and her structures. By opting for the man of Latin America seen in his entirety, by showing preferential yet not exclusive love for the poor, and by encouraging integral liberation of individuals and peoples, Medellín, the Church present in that place, was a call of hope towards more Christian and more human goals. But more than ten years have passed. And interpretations have been given that have

been at times contradictory, not always correct, not always beneficial for the Church. The Church is therefore looking for the ways that will enable her to understand more deeply and fulfil more zealously the mission she has been given by Christ Jesus. Much importance in this regard is found in the sessions of the Synod of Bishops held in the years since then, especially the session of 1974, which concentrated on Evangelization; its conclusions were put together later, in a lively and encouraging manner, in Paul VI's Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. This is the theme that we are today placing before us for study by proposing to consider "Evangelization in Latin America's Present and Future." As we meet in this sacred place to begin our work, we see before our eyes the upper room in Jerusalem, where the Eucharist was instituted. After the Lord's Ascension the Apostles returned to the same upper room in order to devote themselves to prayer, together with Mary, the Mother of Christ, and so prepare their hearts to receive the Holy Spirit at the moment of the Church's birth. That is also why we have come here. We also are awaiting the descent of the Holy Spirit, who will make us see the paths of evangelization by which the Church must continue and must be reborn in this great continent of ours. We also wish today and in the days ahead to devote ourselves to prayer with Mary, the Mother of our Lord and Master—with you, Mother of hope, Mother of Guadalupe.<sup>4</sup> Let me, John Paul II, Bishop of Rome and Pope, together with my Brothers in the Episcopate representing the Church in Mexico and the whole of Latin America, at this solemn moment entrust and offer to you, the handmaid of the Lord, the whole heritage of the Gospel, the Cross, and the Resurrection, of which we are all witnesses, apostles, teachers, and bishops. *O Mother*, help us to be faithful stewards of the great mysteries of God. Help us to teach the truth proclaimed by your Son and to spread love, which is the chief commandment and the first fruit of the Holy Spirit. Help us to strengthen our brethren in faith, help us to awaken hope in eternal life. Help us to guard the great treasures stored in the souls of the People of God entrusted to us. We offer you the whole of this People of God. We offer you the Church in Mexico and in the whole continent. We offer it to you as your own, You have entered so deeply into the hearts of the faithful through that sign of your presence constituted by your image in the Shrine of Guadalupe; be at home in these hearts, for the future also. Be at home in our families, our parishes, missions, dioceses, and in all the peoples. Do this through the Holy Church, for she, in imitation of you, Mother, wishes in her turn to be a good mother and to care for souls in all their needs, by proclaiming the Gospel, administering the Sacraments, safeguarding family life with the sacrament of Matrimony, gathering all into the Eucharistic community by means of the Holy Sacrament of the altar, and by being lovingly with them from the cradle until they enter eternity. *O Mother*, awaken in the younger generation readiness for the exclusive service of God. Implore for us abundant local vocations to the priesthood and the consecrated life. *O Mother*, strengthen the faith of our brothers and sisters in the laity, so that in every field of social, professional, cultural and political life they may act in accordance with the truth and the law brought by your Son to mankind, in order to lead everyone to eternal salvation and, at the same time, to make life on earth more human, more worthy of man. The Church that is carrying out her task among the American nations, the Church in Mexico, wishes to serve this sublime cause with all her strength and with renewed missionary spirit. Mother, enable us to serve the Church in truth and justice. Make us follow this way ourselves and lead others, without ever straying along twisted paths and dragging others with us. We offer and entrust to you everybody and everything for which we have pastoral responsibility, confident that you will be with us and will help us to carry out what your Son has told us to do (cf. Jn 2:5). We bring you this unlimited trust; with this trust I, John Paul II, with all my Brothers in the Episcopate of Mexico and Latin America, wish to bind you still more strongly to our ministry, to the Church and to the life of our nations. We wish to place in your hands the whole of our future, the future of evangelization in Latin America. Queen of the Apostles, accept our readiness to serve unreservedly the cause of your Son, the cause of the Gospel and the cause of peace based on justice and love between individuals and peoples. Queen of Peace, save the nations and peoples of the whole continent—they have so much trust in you—from wars, hatred and subversion. Make everybody, whether they are

rulers or subjects, learn to live in peace, educate themselves for peace, and do what is demanded by justice and respect for the rights of every person, so that peace may be firmly established. Accept our trustful offering, O handmaid of the Lord. May your maternal presence in the mystery of Christ and of the Church become a source of joy and freedom for each and every one, source of that freedom through which "Christ has set us free" (Gal 5:1), and the end a source of that peace that the world cannot give but which is only given by him, by Christ (cf. Jn 14:27). Finally, O Mother, recalling and confirming the gesture of my Predecessors Benedict XIV and Pius X, who proclaimed you Patroness of Mexico and of the whole of Latin America, I present to you a diadem in the name of all your Mexican and Latin-American children, that you may keep them under your protection, preserve their harmony in faith and their fidelity to Christ, your Son. Amen ©  
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