



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO CANADA

(SEPTEMBER 9-20, 1984) CELEBRATION OF THE WORD WITH PRIESTS, RELIGIOUS AND LAITY **HOMILY OF POPE JOHN PAUL II** *St. Mary's Cathedral (Halifax)*

Thursday, 13 September 1984 Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

1. The visitation of Mary to her cousin Elizabeth is a very beautiful episode in the Gospel of Saint Luke. It is the dramatic encounter of two expectant mothers, two women, whose hearts are filled with joy in anticipation of the "human miracle" which is unfolding within their bodies. The account also has an important theological message: it shows how John the Baptist, the greatest of the Old Testament prophets, bore witness to Jesus already from within his mother's womb. It likewise focuses attention on Mary's faith: "Blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled" (*Luc. 1,45*). Together with these reflections we are brought to realize yet another meaning that this Gospel has for us. We are drawn to appreciate the touching human gesture of Mary as she reaches out in love to her cousin Elizabeth. She provides us with a model of service to others, an example of how we, as her spiritual sons and daughters, should open our hearts in compassion to those who yearn for Christ to come to them through us. For the idea of service, dear brothers and sisters, is essential to the lay apostolate and to all ministry. Service is at the very core of every vocation in the Church: the service of God and our neighbour which is at once zealous and humble, always motivated by a desire to fulfil God's will as it is manifested through the guiding action of the Holy Spirit at work in the Church.

2. I wish to tell you how happy I am to be with you this evening. You have come from the farms, villages, towns and cities of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island. By the grace of God each of you has been called to bear witness to Christ in a particular way. You have heard this call and have responded generously to it. I thank you for your active commitment to the Church, and I greet you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and in the name of Mary his Mother in this Halifax Basilica dedicated to her.

3. We read in the Gospel: "God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in him may not be lost but may have eternal life" (*Jo. 3, 16*). Jesus Christ, the Son of God, took on human flesh not "to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many" (*Marc. 10, 45*). After his Resurrection Christ appeared to his disciples, breathing his Spirit into them and sending them to continue his own mission: "As the Father sent me, so am I sending you" (*Jo. 20, 21*). Thus we understand that the Church was founded on the Apostles to continue Christ's mission, which is to lead all humanity through faith to eternal life. Every activity undertaken by the Church for this purpose forms part of her apostolate, and this apostolate is her response to the mission entrusted to her by Christ.

4. Through Baptism and Confirmation everyone is called to share in the saving mission of the Church. As a member of the living organism which is the Mystical Body of Christ, no Christian can play a purely passive part. Each person must participate actively in the life of the Church. For the Christian vocation is, of its nature, a vocation to the apostolate. It is Christ the Head of the Body who personally commissions his members to the apostolate. By sharing in the Church's mission, all the faithful share in Christ's mission. Their effective contribution requires that they live by the faith, hope and charity that is poured into their hearts by the Holy Spirit. And the precept of

charity, which is the Lord's greatest commandment, urges everyone to work for the glory of God and for the communication of eternal life to all people, so that all may know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent (Jo. 17, 3). Among the members of the Church there exists a diversity of services within a unity of mission. To the Apostles and their successors Christ has entrusted the ministry of teaching, sanctifying and governing in his name and by his power. But the laity have been given a share in the priestly, prophetic and kingly functions of Christ (*Lumen Gentium*, 31). To fulfil the role proper to them, they must join their efforts to the ministry of the entire People of God and work in union with those whom the Holy Spirit has appointed to govern the whole Church (Act. 20, 28). At the same time, on all Christians rests the obligation of working to bring the divine message of salvation to all people throughout the world. As lay people you are called to bear witness to Christ within the context of your homes, neighbourhood, towns and cities. You contribute to the Church's mission first of all by showing consistency between your conduct and your faith. In word and deed you must proclaim Christ the Light of the world. This is the general call to the apostolate which all Christians have received. As laity you also have the specific task of renewing the temporal order, by permeating it with the spirit of the Gospel. Coming as you do from different cultural and social backgrounds, you are able to infuse the Christian spirit into the mentality and behaviour, the laws and structures of the community in which you live. Likewise, you exercise a special work and responsibility by engaging in the apostolate of "like towards like": families evangelizing families, students evangelizing students, young people leading young people to Christ. Especially here the witness of your lives is completed by the witness of your word (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 13). Through lives which manifest deep integrity and by your persevering practice of fraternal charity in dealing with others, those whom you encounter in your work and with whom you associate on various levels of social life can be profoundly influenced. You have the very special mission of speaking to the world in a practical way: to manifest truth and justice in your own lives: to proclaim by action your respect for life, your social concern, your rejection of materialism and consumerism. You are called to exemplify purity of life and, if you are married, to be living signs of conjugal fidelity and of the indissolubility of marriage, just as Christ preached them. Never doubt, dear friends, that the word of God has power to bring this about in you: "You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world" (*Matth.* 5, 13-14).⁵ But more than that, to each of you has been given a charism, the gift of the Holy Spirit, enabling you to have a special aptitude for a particular service within the Church. As Saint Paul tells us, the Holy Spirit is given in a particular way to each person: "Our gifts differ according to the grace given us. If your gift is prophecy, then use it as your faith suggests; if administration, then use it for administration; if teaching, then use it for teaching" (*Rom.* 12, 6-7). This exercise of the Christian apostolate may be done as individuals or as members of groups of people who work together for the same particular aim. Within the vast variety of the apostolate some are called to proclaim God's word as catechists, teachers or as those who lead adults through the Rite of Christian Initiation. Some will minister to families, the sick, the imprisoned, the disabled, youth or the aged. Some will assist in the area of social justice or health care or ecumenism. Others exercise administrative talents in diocesan or parish councils, or in the various organisms needed to involve the wider Christian community. Specialized movements of spiritual renewal for individuals and groups, especially for families, are able to contribute greatly to the Church's mission. The role played by the family in the service of the Gospel is held in special honour by the Church. In my Apostolic Exhortation on the role of the Christian family in the modern world, I emphasized that "the ministry of evangelization carried out by Christian parents is original and irreplaceable" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 53). In this regard, children too have a role to play and they should be encouraged to make their contribution. In the words of the Second Vatican Council: "They have their own apostolic work to do" (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 12).⁶ Since the primary aim of the Church's apostolate is to announce to the world by word and action the message of Christ and to communicate to it the saving grace of Christ, the principal means of bringing this about is the ministry of the word and of the sacraments. This task is fulfilled in

a specific way through the ordained ministries conferred by the Sacrament of Orders. Christ himself has instituted the ministerial priesthood to make available to the whole People of God the Eucharistic Sacrifice, which is "the source and summit of the whole Christian life" (*Lumen Gentium*, 11). Hence all ministry is directed to this Sacrifice as to its goal and centre. Some lay people are called to be associated in a particular way with the activities of the bishops, priests and deacons, or to exercise certain pastoral or ministerial tasks in a stable manner. When there is a shortage of clergy, this aspect of lay ministry is particularly providential. Yet all the laity are permanently assigned by Christ himself to the service of his Gospel within the unity of his Church. The Church rejoices when clergy, religious and laity work together, each group according to its specific calling, to give a united witness to the world of a common mission - the mission of Christ.⁷ There is so much to be done. There are whole areas of human life which seem to be withdrawn from any ethical or religious influences. In this situation we are reminded of Jesus: "When he saw the crowds he felt sorry for them because they were harassed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is rich but the labourers are few, so ask the Lord of the harvest to send labourers to his harvest' " (*Matth.* 9, 36-37). The true disciple is eager to announce Christ by word, either to unbelievers so as to draw them to the faith, or to the faithful in order to instruct them, strengthen them and incite them to more fervent Christian lives (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 6). There is truly an urgent need in the Church today for more lay people engaged in teaching Christian doctrine to the young. The diversities of human needs requires a diversity of response on the part of the Church. The Church is one, as is her saving Gospel and her Eucharist, but she counts on the diligence of her members to discover effective ways to face new problems and new needs. Paul VI has clearly stated the Church's stand: "We cannot but experience a great inner joy when we see so many pastors, religious and lay people fired with their mission to evangelize, seeking ever more suitable ways of proclaiming the Gospel effectively" (Pauli VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 73).⁸ We know that the foundation and the fruitfulness of every apostolate and ministry in the Church depends on our living union with Christ our Lord and Master. This life of intimate union with Christ is maintained and nourished by prayer. In a very real sense we can say that the apostolate is the unfolding of Jesus' love for others from within ourselves. However, without that union with Christ which is fostered through prayer our energy flags, we lose fervour and we run the risk of becoming as "a sounding brass or tinkling cymbal" (*1 Cor.* 13, 1). Moreover, all ministry requires the support of the whole Christian community, especially through our perseverance in prayer for each other. How we need to pray for each other! How I appreciate and need your prayers! How your bishops, priests and deacons count on your prayerful support! They know how much you contribute to the well-being of the entire Church, how much you do to promote the saving mission of the Church to the world.⁹ De cette vie spirituelle et apostolique, nous trouvons un modèle dans l'humble Vierge de Nazareth, la Mère de Jésus, la Reine des Apôtres. Le Second Concile du Vatican dit d'elle: "Tandis qu'elle menait sur terre une vie semblable a celle de tous, remplie par les soins et les labeurs familiaux. Marie demeurait toujours intimement unie a son Fils et coopérait a l'œuvre du Sauveur a un titre absolument unique. Aujourd'hui ou elle est au ciel, son amour maternel la rend attentive aux frères de son Fils dont le pèlerinage n'est pas achevé, et qui se trouvent engages dans les peines et les épreuves jusqu'à ce qu'ils parviennent a la patrie bienheureuse" (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 4)¹⁰. Frères et sœurs, rendez grâce a Dieu pour la possibilité qu'il vous donne de servir le Christ et son Eglise. Servez avec reconnaissance et avec joie! Remerciez Dieu pour la foi que vous avez reçue dans vos foyers et vos communautés, et qui s'est répandue partout dans votre pays, et même autour du monde. Remerciez Dieu pour tous ceux qui l'ont servi avant vous, pour tous ceux qui ont annoncé l'Évangile de notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ au long de ces rivages de l'Atlantique. Remerciez Dieu pour vos parents, vos éducateurs et vos pasteurs qui ont été les premiers a vous initier a l'Évangile! As a servant of Christ who loves you all, I urge you, my companions in the faith, fellow pilgrims in our journey to the Father, to listen again to the words which Saint Peter wrote to the early Christian community: "Each of you

has received a special grace, so, like good stewards responsible for all these different graces of God, put yourselves at the service of others. If you are a speaker, speak in words which seem to come from God; if you are a helper, help as though every action was done at God's orders; so that in everything God may receive the glory, through Jesus Christ, since to him alone belong all glory and power, for ever and ever. Amen" (1 Petr. 4, 10-11). © Copyright 1984 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

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