



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO CANADA

(SEPTEMBER 9-20, 1984) **SOLEMN CELEBRATION FOR THE FEAST OF THE**

TRIUMPH OF THE CROSS OF CHRIST *HOMILY OF POPE JOHN PAUL II* *Central Commons (Halifax)*

Friday, 14 September 1984 We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you,

because by your Cross you have redeemed the world. Alleluia. Dear Brothers and Sisters, **1.** As representatives of the People of God in the Archdiocese of Halifax, Cape Breton, all of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, you are united in this acclamation of the liturgy with Archbishop Hayes and your other bishops, and with the Church throughout the world. The Catholic Church celebrates today the feast of the Triumph of the Cross of Christ. Thus the crucified Christ is lifted up by faith in the hearts of all who believe, and he too lifts up those same hearts with a hope that cannot be destroyed. For the Cross is the sign of the Redemption, and in the Redemption is contained the pledge of resurrection and the beginning of new life: the lifting up of human hearts. At the very beginning of my service in the See of Saint Peter I endeavoured to proclaim this truth through the Encyclical "*Redemptor Hominis*". In this same truth I desire to be united with all of you today in the adoration of the Cross of Christ: "Never forget the deeds of the Lord" (*Ps. 78 (77), 7*). **2.** To comply with this acclamation of today's liturgy let us follow attentively the path traced out by these holy words in which the mystery of the Triumph of the Cross is announced to us. In the first place, the meaning of the Old Testament is contained in these words. According to Saint Augustine, the Old Testament conceals within itself what is fully revealed in the New. Here we have the image of the bronze serpent to which Jesus referred in his conversation with Nicodemus. The Lord himself revealed the meaning of this image, saying: "The Son of Man must be lifted up as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him" (*Jo. 3, 14-15*). During Israel's march from Egypt to the Promised Land, God permitted - because of the murmuring of the people - a plague of poisonous snakes, as a result of which many died. When the others understood their sin they asked Moses to intercede before God: "Intercede for us with the Lord to save us from these serpents" (*Num. 21, 7*). Moses prayed and received the following order from the Lord: "Make a fiery serpent and put it on a standard. If anyone is bitten and looks at it, he shall live" (*Ibid. 21, 8*). Moses obeyed the order. The bronze serpent set upon the standard became salvation from death for anyone who was bitten by the serpents. In the Book of Genesis the serpent was a symbol of the spirit of evil. But now, by a startling reversal, the bronze serpent lifted up in the desert is a figure of Christ lifted up on the Cross. The feast of the Triumph of the Cross recalls to our minds, and in a certain sense makes present, the lifting up of Christ on the Cross. This feast is the lifting up of the saving Christ: whoever believes in the Crucified One has eternal life. The lifting up of Christ on the Cross gives a beginning to the lifting up of humanity through the Cross. And the final measure of this lifting up is eternal life. **3.** This Old Testament event is recalled in the central theme of John's Gospel. Why are the Cross and the Crucified One the doorway to eternal life? Because in him - Christ crucified - is manifested to the full the love of God for the world, for man. In the same conversation with Nicodemus Christ says: "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. For God sent his Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but so that through him the world might be saved" (*Io.* 3, 16-17). The salvific lifting up of the Son of God on the Cross has its eternal source in love. This is the love of the Father that sends the Son; he gives his Son for the salvation of the world. And at the same time it is the love of the Son who does not "judge" the world, but gives himself for the love of the Father and for the salvation of the world. Giving himself to the Father through the Sacrifice of the Cross, he gives himself at the same time to the world: to each person and to the whole of humanity. The Cross contains in itself the mystery of salvation, because, in the Cross, Love is lifted up. This is the lifting up of Love to the supreme point in the history of the world: in the Cross Love is lifted up and the Cross is at the same time lifted up through Love. And from the height of the Cross, love comes down to us. Yes: "The Cross is the most profound condescension of God to man . . . The Cross is like a touch of eternal love upon the most painful wounds of man's existence" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II, *Dives in Misericordia*, 8).⁴ To the event of John's Gospel the Liturgy of today's feast adds the presentation made by Paul in his Letter to the Philippians. The Apostle speaks of an emptying of Christ through the Cross; and at the same time of Christ's being lifted up above all things - and this too had its beginning in the same Cross: "Christ Jesus . . . emptied himself to assume the condition of a slave, and became as men are; and being as all men are; and being as all men are, he was humbler yet, even to accepting death, death on a cross. But God raised him high and gave him the name which is above all other names, so that all beings in the heavens, on earth and in the underworld, should bend the knee at the name of Jesus, and that every tongue should acclaim Jesus Christ as Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (*Phil.* 2, 6-11). The Cross is the sign of the deepest humiliation of Christ. In the eyes of the people of that time it was the sign of an infamous death. Free men could not be punished with such a death, only slaves, Christ willingly accepts this death, death on the Cross. Yet this death becomes the beginning of the Resurrection. In the Resurrection the crucified Servant of Yahweh is lifted up: he is lifted up before the whole of creation. At the same time the Cross is also lifted up. It ceases to be the sign of infamous death and becomes the sign of resurrection, that is, of life. Through the sign of the Cross it is not the servant or the slave who is speaking, but the Lord of all creation.⁵ These three elements of today's Liturgy - the Old Testament, the Christological hymn of Paul and the Gospel of John - form together the great wealth of the mystery of the Triumph of the Cross. Finding ourselves immersed in this mystery with the Church, which throughout the world celebrates today the Triumph of the Holy Cross, I wish to share in a special way its riches with you, dear brothers and sisters of the Archdiocese of Halifax, dear people of Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and all Canada. Yes, I wish to share with all of you the riches of that Holy Cross - that standard of salvation which was implanted on your soil 450 years ago. Since that time the Cross has triumphed in this land; and, through the collaboration of thousands of Canadians, the liberating and saving message of the Cross has been spread to the ends of the earth.⁶ At this time I wish to pay homage to the missionary contribution of the sons and daughters of Canada who have given their lives so "that the Lord's message may spread quickly, and be received with *honour as it was among you*" (*2 Thess.* 3, 1). I pay homage to the faith and love that motivated them, and to the power of the Cross that gave them strength to go out and fulfil Christ's command: "Make disciples of all nations; baptize them in name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (*Matth.* 28, 20). And in paying homage to your missionaries, I pay homage likewise to the communities throughout the world who have embraced their message and marked their graves with the Cross of Christ. The Church is grateful for the hospitality of a final resting place given to the missionaries, whence they await the definitive Triumph of the Holy Cross in the glory of resurrection and eternal life. I express profound gratitude for the zeal that has characterized the Church in Canada, and I thank you for the prayers and contributions and various activities through which you support the missionary cause. In particular I thank you for your generosity to the mission aid societies of the Holy See.⁷ Evangelization remains for all time the sacred heritage of Canada, which has indeed such a proud history of missionary activity at home and abroad. Evangelization must continue

to be exercised through personal witness, by preaching hope in the promises of Jesus and by proclaiming fraternal love. It will forever be connected with the implantation and building up of the Church and have a deep relationship with development and liberation as expressions of human advancement. At the centre of the message, however, is an explicit proclamation of salvation in Jesus Christ - that salvation brought about on the Cross. In the words of Paul VI: "Evangelization will also always contain - as the foundation, centre and at the same time summit of its dynamism - a clear proclamation that, in Jesus Christ, the Son of God made man, who died and rose from the dead, salvation is offered to all people, as a gift of God's grace and mercy" (Pauli VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 27). The Church in Canada will be herself to the extent that in all her members she proclaims in word and deed the Triumph of the Cross - to the extent that she is at home and abroad an evangelizing Church. Even as I speak these words there is Another who is speaking to the hearts of young people everywhere. It is the Holy Spirit himself and he is urging each one, as a member of Christ, to embrace and to speak the Good News of God's love. But to some the Spirit is proposing the command of Jesus in its specific missionary form: Go and make disciples of all nations. Before the whole Church, I, John Paul II, proclaim once again the excellent value of the missionary vocation. And I assure all those called to the priesthood and religious life that our Lord Jesus Christ is ready to accept and make fruitful the special sacrifice of their lives, in celibacy, for the Triumph of the Cross.

8. Aujourd'hui l'Eglise, en annonçant l'Évangile, revit d'une certaine manière toute la période qui commence le Mercredi des Cendres, atteint son sommet lors de la Semaine Sainte et a Pâques, et se prolonge au cours des semaines suivantes jusqu'à la Pentecôte. La Fête de la Gloire de la Sainte Croix est comme un abrégé de tout le Mystère Pascal de notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ. La Croix est "glorieuse", parce que sur elle le Christ est élevé. Par elle, le Christ a "élevé" l'homme. Sur la Croix, chaque personne est véritablement élevée à sa pleine dignité - à la dignité de sa En dernière en Dieu. Par la Croix aussi, est révélée la puissance de l'Amour qui élève l'homme, qui l'exalte. Vraiment, tout le plan de Dieu sur la vie chrétienne, sur la vie humaine, est condensé et repris ici d'une manière merveilleuse: le plan de Dieu et son sens! Donnons notre adhésion à ce plan de Dieu - et à son sens! Retrouvons la place de la Croix dans notre vie et dans notre société. Parlons de la croix particulièrement à tous ceux qui souffrent, et transmettons son message d'espérance aux jeunes. Continuons à proclamer jusqu'aux extrémités de la terre son pouvoir sauveur: Exaltatio Crucis! la Gloire de la Sainte Croix! Brothers and sisters: "Never forget the deeds of the Lord"! Amen. © Copyright 1984 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana