



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC PILGRIMAGE TO COLOMBIA

MASS FOR THE FAITHFUL AT REDUIT PARK

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Saint Lucia

Monday, 7 July 1986

1. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing". On this special day, when I have the great joy of celebrating the Eucharist with you here in Saint Lucia, let our first thoughts be thoughts of praise and thanksgiving to the Triune God: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

How good it is to join our voices as one in the praise of God's holy name, to glorify the Lord for the gift of our faith. I have looked forward to this moment with great anticipation, and I give thanks to God that his loving providence has made it possible for me to be with you today. My feelings are well expressed in the words of Saint Paul which we have just listened to in the First Reading: "Because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love towards all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers".

2. In today's Gospel, our Lord says to Saint Peter: "I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren". These words of Christ have particular meaning for me as the Successor of Saint Peter. For they indicate the specific mission in the Church given to Peter and to all those who were to come after him and continue his office. They indicate my own mission in the Church today: namely, to strengthen my brothers and sisters in the faith.

It is because of this mission entrusted to me by Christ that I feel called to undertake my pastoral

journeys, to visit the local Churches around the world. This is why I am here with you today: I come as the Successor of Saint Peter, to encourage you in the name of Jesus and do confirm you in your faith.

3. And what a wondrous blessing is the gift of faith, the gift of knowing and believing in the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit. With this precious gift the Lord has blessed us all. We celebrate it in this Eucharist. The words of Saint Paul describe our situation. In Christ, he says, you “have heard the word of truth, the Gospel of your salvation, and have believed in him.”

The Gospel was first brought to Saint Lucia more than three centuries ago, when French settlers arrived accompanied by some priests. From that time on, faith in Christ has had an influence on the development of your land. But continual struggles between different Governments for control of the Island made sustained evangelization difficult in those first hundred years. Nevertheless, a number of the faithful held firmly to their belief in Christ, and the Church took ever deeper root in the hearts of the people.

As early as 1820, a group of lay people began the Confraternity of the Holy Rosary, an organization which combined fervent devotion to the Mother of God with a genuine practice of charity and fraternal service. Even though slavery was still part of civil society at that time, the Confraternity bore witness to the equal dignity of all by welcoming slaves as members. This first association, and numerous other lay societies which were begun thereafter, give clear evidence of the vitality of the faith in your land and of the vital role of the laity in the mission of the Church.

Throughout the history of Saint Lucia, God has blessed you with zealous priests and religious. The first women religious arrived in 1847, and within a month they had already opened a school to teach young people. This first initiative was soon followed by many others. And no one can doubt the enormous contribution to the development and culture of Saint Lucia which has been made through the generous efforts of your priests working in harmony with the men and women religious. Although always fewer in number than the needs required, they tried to make up for this by their dedication and zeal.

With the constant growth of the Church on this Island, it was finally possible in 1956 to establish the Diocese of Castries. Then, only eighteen years later, it was raised to the rank of an Archdiocese, with the first Archbishop being a worthy son of your own land, Archbishop Patrick Webster.

God's grace has indeed been at work in your midst. The history of the Church in Saint Lucia bears witness to the goodness and mercy of God, to “the immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe”.

4. The gift of faith "enlightens the eyes of our hearts", giving us a new vision of life and of the

world. Every human event takes on a new perspective when we know that God is our loving Father who watches over us with gentleness and compassion. And having been “sealed with the promised Holy Spirit” in Baptism and Confirmation, we are sent forth to live our faith, “to employ it for one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace”.

The first response to the gift of faith is praise and gratitude, and this is accomplished especially in the Church’s greatest act of worship: the Eucharist. A deep faith always expresses itself in a fervent love for the Eucharist, for it is at Mass that we hear the word of Life and share in the Body and Blood of Christ our Lord. I urge you therefore to make Sunday Mass and frequent Communion a regular part of your lives, in fact the centre and summit of an you are and do.

Faith, which we have received as a gift, must in turn be put into practice. Saint James tells us that “faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead”. That is why I am so pleased at all the efforts you are making to practise your faith. An excellent example of this is the Pastoral Theme which you have chosen for the Archdiocese this year: “Strengthen our faith, Redeemer”. I am confident that this deserving initiative will bring you many graces as you continually practise your faith through prayer and good works.

We also need to deepen our knowledge of the faith through reading, study and prayer. This enables us to share that faith with other, to help others to rejoice in the Good News of salvation. Our faith ago causes us to work for justice and to serve the needs of others. As Baptism confers on us the great dignity of being brothers and sisters in Christ, so we are called to work for the dignity and equality of every human being.

In a very special way our faith invites us to promote the dignity of the Christian family, in accordance with God’s unchanging plan. The married love of husband and wife must reflect by its fidelity and permanence the love of Christ for his Church. Married couples are called to be a communion of persons sharing in the creative activity of God and providing education for their children. Our faith emphasizes that “the family has the mission to guard, reveal and communicate love”. Every effort of the community to defend and strengthen the family is a great contribution to the whole nation. Every effort made by Christians to be faithful to God’s plan for human love and human life is an expression of living faith.

5. Together with the gift of faith, God has blessed your country with youth and vitality. You are a new nation, having achieved independence only seven years ago. And you are blessed with a large population of young people. When I think of your youthful vigour, I am reminded of what Archbishop Richard P. Smith wrote when he visited your country in 1841: “There is a glorious future in store for the Church in Saint Lucia”.

Yes, there is a glorious future in store for you, if you build that future on the solid foundation of the Gospel and upon truly human values. The future is not merely given to us, nor is it forced upon us.

We must cooperate with God to achieve it. And this requires virtues and discipline: the virtues of honesty and truthfulness, the virtue of fidelity to promises, the discipline of prayer and sacrifice, and the discipline of personal effort and fraternal collaboration. If you truly make these a part of your lives, then the words of Archbishop Smith will prove true.

6. I would now like to address a few words to the youth of Saint Lucia. Dear young friends: the future of your nation belongs to you, for you are the leaders of tomorrow. As you plan and prepare for the future, it is right that you should aspire to greatness, that you should wish to accomplish great things in your lives. May you never give up these desires, but remain always men and women of high principles and hopes. And remember what Jesus teaches us about greatness, about who is the greatest: "Let the greatest among you", he says, "become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves". It was precisely in this way that Jesus revealed the greatness of his love. That is why he said of himself: "I am among you as one who serves".

I also wish to repeat to you what I wrote to all the youth of the world in my Apostolic Letter of Palm Sunday last year: "Do not be afraid of the love that places clear demands on people. These demands - as you find them in the constant teaching of the Church - are precisely capable of making your love a true love". May you always aspire to greatness, to the greatness of generous service, and may you be ever eager to love God and your neighbour, whatever the cost. God has loved you with an infinite and tender love, and you must repay love with love.

In this context, dear young friends, I ask you to consider prayerfully what vocation Christ is calling you to in the Church. The Church looks to you with great hope. For the mission of the Church is so vast. And as Jesus said: "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few". What a great need there is for married couples whose generous and faithful love for one another reflects the love of Christ for the Church! And great is the need for priests and religious, for messengers of the Good News of salvation. Surely the Lord who cares for his flock is calling many of you to these vocations in the Church. Listen to him, then, in the quiet of your heart And answer willingly when you hear him say: "Follow me"!

7. Dear young people, and all of you, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, I encourage you in the words of the Letter to the Hebrews: "Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith". If we keep our eyes fixed on Christ, he will lead us to perfect faith, he will show us the way to fullness of joy in his presence.

It was faith which sustained your ancestors in all their sufferings and trials. And the same light of faith will guide you safely into the twenty-first century, and even more importantly to eternal life. Never doubt the goodness and mercy of God and "the immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe".

Zanfan Bon Dye, pwen kouwaj, mete konfyans ou an Bon Dye. (Children of God, take courage,

put your trust in God).

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