



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC PILGRIMAGE TO BANGLADESH, SINGAPORE, FIJI ISLANDS,
NEW ZEALAND, AUSTRALIA AND SEYCHELLES

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Sydney (Australia), 26 November 1986

*"As you sent me into the world,
I have sent them into the world".*

Dearly Beloved in Christ,

1. Jesus spoke these words the day before his Passion and Death. They are part of his "priestly prayer" at the Last Supper.

They are key words. They speak of the Father sending the Son. And they speak of the mission passed on in turn by the Son to his Church.

Jesus Christ sends the Apostles into the world. He sends the Church. From generation to generation the Church is sent by Christ, to carry on, in the power of the Holy Spirit, the mission that Christ received from the Father.

The Church in Sydney and throughout New South Wales - and in the whole of Australia - carries out her apostolic service in the context of that divine mission. I express my real joy that - as Bishop of Rome and Successor of Peter - I can be here with you today. I thank God that I can, as it were, be "in the midst" of this, the Church's service, which had its origin at the Last Supper in the Upper Room, and took shape in Jesus' priestly prayer. The effectiveness of this service comes from his Cross and Resurrection.

In the same prayer Jesus adds: "For their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be

consecrated in the truth". Down through the ages and still today the whole life of the Christian community is linked with the living presence of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Redeemer of the human family, the One sent by the Father for the life of the world.

2. I wish to reach out to each one of you gathered here for this Eucharistic celebration. In you I embrace the whole ecclesial community of New South Wales, each diocese of which is represented at this Liturgy. I greet Cardinal Freeman, Archbishop Clancy and the other bishops, the priests, the men and women religious, the faithful, young and old of every condition, race and origin. May Christ pour out his peace abundantly into your hearts!

I thank the distinguished representatives of Government and public life in New South Wales for the courtesy of their presence.

I express my cordial gratitude for the presence here of members of the other Christian Churches and Communions. In our common love of our Lord Jesus Christ may we find inspiration and strength to persevere on the path of ecumenism, until that day when there shall be full communion of faith and life between us.

3. Brothers and sisters: Christ's words to his Father at the Last Supper still speak to us today, here in Australia. "As you did send me into the world, so I have sent them". Thus he sends the Apostles and their successors. "Their voice has gone out through all the earth, and their message to the ends of the world".

From generation to generation the Church seeks the paths that lead to man in the ever-changing conditions of his existence, culture and civilization. What she carries with her along these paths is the Gospel. In offering the Gospel to man, the Church offers the word of the living God and the truth that gives life. "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach good news!". The response required of us is to confess that Jesus is Lord and believe in our heart that God raised him from the dead. Through this confession of truth we reach salvation.

So it is with Australia. The Gospel must be fully immersed into this Australian culture, with all its diversity. Within a relatively short recorded history, this land has already witnessed a variety of human experiences, great and small, which go to make up the Australia of today. In many ways the Gospel has already become firmly embedded into the life of society, though it is also true that the rift between the Gospel message and culture requires a new evangelization, a second evangelization.

4. Sixteen years ago my predecessor Paul VI stood on this very spot and spoke of the temptation "of reducing everything to an earthly humanism, to forget life's moral and spiritual dimension, and to stop caring about man's necessary relationship with the Creator of all his goods and the supreme Legislator of their use". That temptation is as old as human life itself. But in our day it

calls for a renewed response on the part of the Church and of each of her members.

In many parts of the modern world it is now no longer a question of proclaiming the Gospel to those who have never heard it. as it was for the Apostles and many missionaries since their time. Today it is a question of addressing those who have heard it but who no longer respond. I am thinking of those baptized in the faith who are no longer actively present in the Church. They are of many different types, and the reasons for their absence from the community of Christ's faithful are also many.

There are some who, although baptized, never really had the chance to know the Gospel well. As Jesus himself said: "Some of the seed fell on the edge of the path, and the birds came and ate it up". They were never fully evangelized. There are others whose spiritual energies have been drained by the conditions of the times: economic pressures, modern scepticism, the indifference of so many people to religious faith. In this category we see that "some seed fell into thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it". There are still others who have perhaps been hurt in the Church: by the misunderstanding or abruptness of the Church's ministers, by the scandal of their fellow Christians, by the rapidity and unexpectedness of change, by a lack of explanation of laws whose reasons they have not understood, by the coldness of some communities of the faithful seeming to lack zeal and love. To all these reasons of course must be added the ever-present fact of human pride, selfishness and sloth.

5. To all those who have wandered from their spiritual home I wish to say: Come back! The Church opens her arms to you, the Church loves you! I have already written in my Encyclical Letter "Dives in Misericordia" that "the Church of our time . . . must become more particularly and profoundly conscious of the need to bear witness in her whole mission to God's mercy". In the Sacrament of Penance or Reconciliation you will be able to experience in a wonderful way the boundless mercy of God in Christ. Therefore I say: Do not be afraid! Come home! The community of faith in which you were reborn, and to some extent brought up, urges you to accept God's mercy. It begs you to take your place once again in the midst of God's people, the place that you alone can fill. This invitation comes to you from Christ. To say yes is to open your hearts to his love.

6. In the first reading of this Mass, the Prophet Isaiah speaks to us of "the mountain of the house of the Lord" to which "all the nations shall flow . . . and many peoples shall come". It is a vision of the restored Temple where God's people gather to acknowledge that he is the Lord of heaven and earth: "Come let us go up to the mountain of the Lord . . . that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths".

This is a vision of people rising above themselves, climbing the mountain of God, It is a vision of people who refuse to be self-centred, who reach out to grasp God's truth and to seek the face of the living God. And if you seek God, you will discover his likeness in every other human being.

The Gospel message is always a call to go beyond self. Experience shows that man cannot really be himself unless he rises above himself, unless he makes demands upon himself.

One of the particular temptations of our times is to become so secure and self-sufficient that our minds and hearts are not open to the word of God. Yet "the word of God is something alive and active: it cuts like any double-edged sword but more finely". The "narrow gate" and "difficult way" in the Gospel are in fact the path "that leads to life". Paul VI said, in this very place, that "self-centredness, hedonism, eroticism, and many other counterfeits, lead in the end to contempt for man, and do not, for all that, satisfy his profound restlessness". This is the sad experience of our world. On the one hand the dehumanizing consequences of poverty and oppression rob millions of our brothers and sisters of their birthright, their dignity as human beings. On the other hand, the materialism of a prosperous society too often leads to an equivalent dehumanization in the form of emptiness and frustration.

7. A truly human life is possible for us only to the extent that we are open to the needs of other people, including those of nations other than our own. The human person is the subject and goal of all social institutions, including the cultural, social, political, national and international realities which form the context of all human life. To say that everyone has general and specific rights and duties in relation to the common good is to emphasize the obvious. But this principle is not always evident in human affairs. I realize that in Australia there is a growing sensitivity to inequalities and injustices. As Christians you are called to judge reality in the light of the Gospel. And the Gospel urges you to work for a society based on truth, built on justice and animated by love, a society which, in freedom, will grow every day more humane. At the same time the common good "takes on an increasingly universal complexion and consequently involves rights and duties with respect to the whole human race".

Unless each individual and group becomes a servant of this common good, social harmony and peace among nations will continue to be undermined. Much of the tension in our world exists because of the natural limits of economic, political and social structures, but at a deeper level much evil flows from personal selfishness and pride operating through those structures of society. Isaiah's vision of a time when the peoples of the earth "will hammer their swords into ploughshares, their spears into sickles", when "nation will not lift sword against nation", will always remain an empty dream unless there is a true conversion to the ways of peace and justice, a conversion of the heart.

Brothers and sisters: the demands Jesus makes upon his followers are not empty rhetoric, and they do not change with the passing of time. He calls us to conversion, to reconciliation with God and with one another. Jesus wishes us to hear the "hard sayings" as well as the words of confidence and encouragement. Is the Christian message any less humane for all that? Only when we truly go out of ourselves to meet the real challenges of our human destiny do we discover the full truth about ourselves. That is what Jesus, the Way, the Truth and the Life, has

taught us and what he prayed for at the Last Supper: "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth".

8. In today's Gospel reading Jesus prays to the Father: "Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one".

Australia has been blessed over the years by an increase of mutual respect and Christian fellowship between the various Churches and Communions. Ecumenism is a task for all Christians. It is important that the efforts being made by different Communions to reach agreement in matters of faith and doctrine, should be supported in every local community by greater prayer and penance. Local initiatives of shared prayer for Christian unity, deeper study of God's word, collaboration in the use of the mass media, and various initiatives of service are to be encouraged. I have heard with particular pleasure of one such initiative in Australia, "Prayer on Wheels", which has brought remarkable comfort to the sick and other housebound people unable to attend Church services. In all of these ways I urge you to press forward towards that unity which Christ willed for his followers, "so that the world may believe". So that Australia may believe!

9. Let us always remember the words that Jesus spoke to his Father: "That the world may know . . . that you have loved them as you have loved me". Everything that Jesus Christ has done for our salvation shows us that we are loved by the Father - his Father and ours - from whom every good gift comes. This is the message of the Bible, this is the meaning of the Gospels: God loves us just as he loves his Son - with an everlasting love.

The paths of God's love are the paths of life. Sadly, the flight from God which marks some aspects of contemporary society is a flight towards darkness and death. Far too many of the world's resources are being used to produce weapons of destruction. Too often the progress of science and technology is used to serve a false or incomplete understanding of our human nature and destiny. On the contrary to defend life, to uphold its inalienable dignity from the moment of conception until natural death, to work for the eradication of discrimination against any person for reasons of race, origin, colour, culture, sex or religion - all of this is to cherish life, the great gift of the Father's love.

In the Christian perspective there is even more. Jesus Christ is the one who reveals a new life: life in the Spirit. Saint Paul proclaims: "He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit which dwells in you". In the words of the Second Vatican Council, Jesus Christ "not only provides us with an example for our imitation; he blazed a trail, and if we follow it. life and death are made holy and take on a new meaning.

Again and again Jesus Christ offers true Life to man: to every man, woman and child; to each individual, to each family and to the whole of humanity.

This land, so ancient and yet so modern, so blessed yet so much in need - this land is thirsting for life. It is thirsting for the true life revealed in Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the Son of Man. It is thirsting to live this life with dignity and happiness in this world, and to possess its fullness in heaven.

The Southern Cross which adorns these skies and appears on your national flag may be read as a sign of Australia's vocation. It is the Gospel of the Cross of Jesus Christ - the Way, the Truth and the Life - that directs you in hope towards the fullness of everlasting life.

To accept Christ and to live his Gospel is to choose Life!

Praised be Jesus Christ! Amen.

© Copyright 1986 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana