



The Holy See

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

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Adelaide (Australia), 30 November 1986

"I rejoice when I heard them say: Let us go to God's house".

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

1. With these words the whole Church proclaims her Advent joy. Today is the First Sunday of Advent. We are drawing near to that night when the shepherds in the fields around Bethlehem experienced the joy of the angels' call to go and see the Lord:

" Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us".

Yes, again today, here in Adelaide, the Church reminds us that the Lord is at hand. And like the shepherds on that wonderful night in Bethlehem, we too say: "Let us go to the house of the Lord ".

Advent is the time of preparation for Christmas, for the coming of the Saviour. It calls us to "go rejoicing to the house of the Lord . . . and there to praise the Lord's name". To praise the name of the Most High God - the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit: that is our first intention at this Eucharistic celebration.

2. "I rejoiced when I heard them say: Let us go to God's house". With this same joy of the Advent Liturgy I greet all of you gathered here in Adelaide. In the name of Jesus Christ I greet you, the people of South Australia. I greet you, Archbishop Faulkner, Archbishop Gleeson, Bishop De Campo and all my brother bishops, together with the priests, religious and laity of Adelaide and

Port Pirie. I greet the members of the other Christian Churches and Communion. I greet the representatives of public life. I embrace in the love of the Saviour all the children, the young, the old, the sick.

At the same time I greet all the inhabitants of this continent of Australia, journeying together with you towards the Lord's house, along the paths of that Advent which is human history - the Advent in which the whole human family and the whole of creation are awaiting the Second Coming of our Saviour Jesus Christ!

Only a few years separate us from the end of the second millennium and the beginning of the third millennium of the Christian era. This is a time of grace for the Church. It is a time for us as followers of Jesus Christ, in the midst of the profound transformations affecting culture and society, to rededicate ourselves to Christian living. It is a time for the Gospel message to be proclaimed to the men and women of this age with the force of a new Pentecost. It is a time in which the Spirit of truth himself is clearly speaking words of life to the human family.

3. In the Eucharistic celebration of this First Sunday of Advent, we are praying for the fulfilment of the Father's plan for the human family: "In that new world where the fullness of your peace will be revealed, gather people of every race, language and way of life to share in one eternal banquet with Jesus Christ the Lord".

In other words, we are praying for the fulfilment of the Prophet Isaiah's vision as expressed in the first reading: "All nations will stream to . . . the mountain of the Lord . . . that he may teach us his ways so that we may walk in his paths". The desire for that time of grace and peace is deeply rooted in our hearts. Who does not look forward eagerly to that end-time when "nation will not lift sword against nation, (when) there will be no more training for war".

There is indeed an Advent season that is universal and lasts as long as human history. Today we meditate on Isaiah's vision of people without number on the march to the mountain of the Lord - God's people in every age and in every place being gathered into union with him and unity among themselves in the Church. And we should reflect on this vision as it is being realized in the concrete reality of your Australian life in the history and culture of your continent and of South Australia in particular.

This Eucharistic assembly is itself a symbol of the Prophet's vision. You are a people gathered from "every race, language and way of life", made one in Jesus Christ and in his Church.

Australia: land of many cultures!

Australia: land of different ethnic groups, shaped by the traditions, attitudes and hopes of so many people whose faith sustained them in the difficult task of making a new home on this continent!

4. Long before the Christian era, long before Moses led God's people to freedom, long before Abraham set out for a new country to father a new nation, migrating waves of Aboriginal peoples came to this great South Land. Here they settled down in close relationship with the land which had become their home.

More recently, in the last two hundred years, new migrations have been bringing to Australia people from every continent. First came settlers from Great Britain and Ireland. But within decades a multicultural community was evolving as new arrivals came from Europe and Asia. Already in the 1860s, here in the Clare Valley of South Australia, people from England, Ireland, Poland, Austria and Germany lived side by side with the Aboriginal inhabitants. In more recent times Australia has welcomed peoples from Asia, the Middle East, Latin America and other parts of Australasia.

Often the victims of poverty or the devastation of war or religious persecution came here to make a new beginning in life. They faced hardship and deprivation. Out of a great deal of human misery and suffering, there is now emerging a nation filled with hope and promise.

This is your history. This is the shaping of your culture as the people of Australia. In this story there is much to be proud of. It is also a story in which you recognize the need for that reconciliation which comes through Jesus Christ. All people have a right to love and value what is good in their own heritage. All people have a right to self-respect and dignity. The tensions which sometimes arise when people of differing histories, traditions, cultures and faiths seek to live side by side have to be overcome in a spirit of true openness and brotherhood. Ultimately, what is required is openness to that divine and transcendent providence which guides the nations towards a fuller recognition of unity - the unity of all who bear the image of the One who "holds all things in unity": Jesus Christ, "the image of the unseen God and the firstborn of all creation".

5. The word of God has called us to be an alert and watchful people, standing ready, clothed in the very armour of Jesus Christ:

"You know 'the time' has come: you must wake up now . . .

The night is almost over, it will be daylight soon.

Let us live decently as people do in the daytime . . .

no wrangling or jealousy.

Let your armour be the Lord Jesus Christ".

Every expression of hostility towards others builds a wall of tension between people and reveals a heart of stone. Every act of discrimination is an act of injustice and a violation of personal dignity.

Every time we are intolerant we close our eyes to God's image in the other person. Every time we fail to recognize the demands of worldwide justice, we fail to grasp the meaning of our universal solidarity.

But when we speak with kind words, when we respect and honour one another, when we show true friendship, when we offer hospitality, when we make an effort to understand the differences between people - then we become a living sign that Isaiah's vision is being realized, that the Kingdom of God has come among us, that the universal Advent of history is proceeding towards its fulfilment.

6. Today the Church invites each and every one of us to take willingly and joyfully the path that God has prepared for the whole human race. The Prophet Isaiah speaks of that path as going up to the mountain of the Lord, to the Temple of the God of Jacob. A part of this "going up" is man's vocation to seek full and authentic humanity, to refine and develop his spiritual and bodily qualities, while he struggles to bring the world under his control through the advancement of knowledge and through his own labour. This the human family does through cultural advancement.

Men and women today are clearly aware that, more than ever before, they are called to fashion their own destiny in this world. The means to do so are increasingly available: a better understanding of the earth and its secrets; a better understanding of the movement of history and social organization; and the world of communications, which gives more and more people an opportunity to share in modern progress. A more humane world is struggling to be born.

And yet, at every turn the highest hopes are accompanied by disturbing contradictions. As regards respect for fundamental human rights, the last decades have witnessed much progress and a growing awareness of the rightness of this cause. We cannot, however, overlook the fact that our world still offers too many examples of radical injustice and oppression.

Were there exists a great good to be achieved, a great moral maturity and a great sense of justice are also needed. Without a vision of the sublime dignity of the human person - a dignity founded on each one's unique relationship to the Creator and Redeemer, a dignity linked to the transcendent nature, origin and destiny of man - progress lacks a sure direction.

Jesus Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life, reveals to us the real meaning of history. He reveals God's plan for humanity. Jesus speaks to our freedom and calls us to promote truly human progress when he gives us his law of love and service: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you". The Gospel purifies and strengthens all culture, thus enabling it to help man to "go up to the mountain of the Lord . . . that he may teach us his ways so that we may walk in his paths".

7. The call of Jesus is clear. He says: "Stay awake". And again: "Stand ready, because the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect". In this way he urges all his followers to work for the goal that the Father has set: the Kingdom of justice, truth and peace. In this way he urges the faithful in Australia to help remedy whatever injustices may mar the life of their nation, and to ensure that a new spirit of reconciliation animates the entire national life. Jesus makes it clear that we will be judged on how we respond to his presence in the hungry, the naked, the sick and the imprisoned. Dear brothers and sisters: you are called to be partners with God in building up his Kingdom in the hearts of all Australians, hearts of flesh and not of stone.

Our reflection today on Australia as a land of many cultures has helped us to see your history against the background of God's eternal love for the whole human family revealed in the saving mission of Jesus Christ. It is a history still unfolding. It presents many challenges to you as a nation, to the Church in this land, and to every individual citizen. This too is the Advent, full of expectation, which the Church celebrates at this time. We go forward, as the pilgrim People of God, following Jesus who is the Way to the Father. We go forward in the certainty that his truth will set us free, and our strength comes from his words and his sacrament.

8. With eyes fixed on the One who is to come, let us also look upon this entire continent, and upon every ethnic group and every cultural tradition that belongs to it. And upon all Australia let us invoke the blessing of the Psalm: "Peace be to your homes! May peace reign in your walls . . . For love of my brethren and friends I say: 'Peace upon you!' For love of the house of the Lord I will ask for your good".

For you: Adelaide! For you: Australia! For you: the entire world! And let us continue to look to him, the One who is to come, the "Prince of Peace". Concerning him, the prophet says:

"He will wield authority over the nations
and adjudicate between many peoples;
these will hammer their swords into ploughshares, their spears into sickles.
Nations will not lift sword against nation, there will be no more training for war.
O House of Jacob, come,
let us walk in the light of the Lord".

This is the light of Advent. It is the light of the Advent that stretches out before the human family until the Lord comes again in glory - the Advent of man's responsibility for the life and for the world that the Creator has placed in his hands.

The light is the light of the One who is to come, the Prince of Peace. It is the light of Christ.
May the light of Christ shine upon Australia: land of many cultures!
May the light of Christ shine upon each one of you. Amen.

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