



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AND CANADA

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Tamiami Park, Miami

Friday, 11 September 1987

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, 1. The psalm of today's liturgy urges all the peoples and nations of the earth to give glory to God. In the exultant spirit of this exhortation I find myself on American soil, joined with all of you here in Miami, to express and praise the glory of God through the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ, in the Eucharist. There is no better way to express God's glory than this sacrament. There is no other prayer which more profoundly unites earth with heaven, or the creature with the Creator, than the Eucharist. There is no other sacrifice in which everything that exists, and particularly man, is able to become a gift for the one who has so generously lavished him with gifts. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, all of you assembled here today in southern Florida and all the people of this land, you the great nation of the United States: give glory to God together with me—the Bishop of Rome, the Successor of Saint Peter, who is beginning here in Miami his act of papal service. May God's blessing be upon us! May the holy fear of God reach the ends of the earth! (cf. Ps 67,(66), 8) 2. I am very pleased to be with you in Florida, this beautiful land of the sun. I warmly greet you, my brothers and sisters of the Catholic faith, and I extend cordial greetings to those of you who are not members of the Church but are here as welcome friends. I thank you all for coming. I also acknowledge among you the presence of so many ethnic groups, including Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans, others from Central America and the Caribbean, together with all the rest who make up the community of the Church. I embrace you all in the love of Christ. La Iglesia en Florida cuenta con una rica y variada historia a lo largo de más de cuatro siglos y medio. Ponce de León descubrió esta tierra en Pascua de 1513 y le dio el nombre español de Pascua Florida. De aquí que el nombre de vuestro Estado evoque el misterio central de nuestra fe cristiana: la Resurrección de Nuestro Señor y Salvador Jesucristo. El primer asentamiento y la primera parroquia de América del Norte fue establecida precisamente aquí a comienzos de la década de 1560, más de cincuenta años antes de que los "Pilgrim Fathers" desembarcaran en Plymouth Rock. Los habitantes de Florida pueden, con toda razón, enorgullecerse de su ilustre historia, así como de su presente dinamismo y fuerza de difusión. En efecto, Miami representa hoy una ciudad internacional de influencia creciente. Es un pórtico de entrada, un cruce de caminos de culturas y lenguas diversas; un centro de comunicación, viajes y comercio, un puente que une la historia antigua y moderna de América. This land of fascinating nature, this home of so many different peoples, this place of tourists and haven of senior citizens, this center of the scientific achievements of Cape Canaveral, this State which is

Florida, has also been *a land of rapid growth in building up the Body of Christ*. An indication of this remarkable recent growth is the fact that within just twenty-nine years the Catholic Church in Florida has grown from one diocese to seven. It is indeed a joy for me to be in the midst of this dynamic Church in Florida, a Church which proclaim by word and deed *the Good News of the Easter mystery*. 3. *Who is the God whose glory we desire to proclaim by means of the Eucharist? He is the God who shows us the way of salvation*. Thus the Psalmist, who urges all the nations of the earth to praise the glory of God, at the same time exclaims: "may your ways be known upon earth; among all nations your salvation" (*Ps* 67 (66),3). Our God shows us the way. He is not the God of intellectual abstraction, but the God of the Covenant, the God of salvation, the Good Shepherd. Christ, the Son of the living God, speaks to us this very day in the Gospel, using this word, so simple yet so eloquent and rich: Shepherd! "I am the Good Shepherd", he says. "I know my sheep and my sheep know me in the same way that the Father knows me and I know the Father" (*Io* 10,14-15). In another passage of the Gospel Christ says to us: "No one knows the Son but the Father, and no one knows the Father but the Son—and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal him" (*Matth* 11,27). The Son, Jesus Christ, is the Shepherd precisely because he reveals the Father to us. He is the Good Shepherd. And the Father is our Shepherd. And the Father is our Shepherd through the Son, through Christ. And in his Son the Father wants us to have eternal life. 4. Jesus goes on to tell us, in words that speak eloquently of his deep love for us: "The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (*Io* 10,11). . Who is this God whose truth we desire to confess by means of the Eucharist? He is the Father who in Christ gives life to us whom he created in his own image and likeness. This life in God is salvation. It is liberation from death. It is redemption from our sins. And this God is Christ, the Son who is of one substance with the Father, who became man for us and for our salvation, Christ the Good Shepherd who has given his very own life for the sheep. The Eucharist proclaims this truth about God. The Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ is offered as a redemptive Sacrifice for the sins of the world. It is the sacrament of the Death and Resurrection of Christ, in which our new life in God begins. This God is Love. The Good Shepherd expresses this truth about God. More than the truth, he expresses the very reality of God as Love. Love desires what is good. It desires salvation. It is "gentle and patient", and it "will have no end" (cf. *1Cor* 13,4-8). It will not rest before it has nourished and given life to all in the great sheepfold, before it has embraced all. For this reason Jesus says: "I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must led them, too, and they shall hear my voice. There shall be one flock then, one shepherd" (*Io*. 10, 16). 5. We draw the image of the flock, and the sheepfold, from the text of John's Gospel. At the same time, the reading from the Letter to the Ephesians that we have heard in today's Liturgy enables us to see this image with the eyes of Paul the Apostle. For him the flock is "the body" of which the head is Christ, and thus it is the Body of Christ. In this context it is not difficult to find the likeness between the Head and the Shepherd. At the same time however the entire image acquires a new meaning and a new expression. The Shepherd leads the flock to the springs of life. As Head, Christ is the source of life for all those who make up his Body. Thus all of us, who as one single flock follow Christ the Good Shepherd, are at the same time called "*to build up the body of Christ*" (*Eph*. 4, 12). According to the Letter to the Ephesians this "building up" has two dimensions: a personal dimension and a community dimension. Each person must attain that form of perfection which is Christ come to full stature. At the same time, we must all come to maturity "*together*" in the community of the Church. As the whole People of God we move towards this fullness in Christ. Christ gives the Church a rich variety of charisms for the purpose of deepening our communion as his Body. He bestows on the Church a great diversity of vocations, not just for the well-being of each person but for the good of all. As Saint Paul says of Jesus, "It is he who gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers in roles of service for the faithful to build up the body of Christ, till we become one in faith and in the knowledge of God's Son" (*Ibid*. 4, 11-13). 6. The Church in the United States, and in a particular way the Church in Miami, experiences this *mystery of unity in diversity* in a very real sense. Yours is a community of compassion, which

over and over again has echoed the message inscribed on the Statue of Liberty: "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free". The civic community and the Church in southern Florida have time after time opened their arms to immigrants and refugees. These people were strangers and you welcomed them. And be sure that as often as you did it for them, you did it for Christ (Cfr. *Matth.* 25, 31-46). I take this occasion to assure you of the Church's particular concern for those who leave their native countries in suffering and desperation. The frequent repetition of this experience is one of the saddest phenomena of our century. Yet it has often been accompanied by hope and heroism and new life. Here in Miami, I know, there are many who in the face of distress have been faithful to the Gospel and the law of God. Like others who have remained *faithful to Christ and his Church* in time of oppression, you must guard and protect your Catholic faith as you now live your lives in freedom. Fidelity to religious practice requires great personal effort in a complex and industrialized society. It takes maturity of faith and strong conviction to take up the Cross each day and follow in the footsteps of Christ. In today's second reading we hear Saint Paul's encouragement: "Let us, then, be children no longer, tossed here and there, carried about by every wind of doctrine that originates in human trickery and skill in proposing error. Rather, let us profess the truth in love and grow to the full maturity of Christ the head" (*Eph.* 4, 14-15). As I gaze at this great city with its many peoples and cultures, I pray that you will all help one another with your gifts. Stay in touch with your own roots, your cultures and your traditions; pass on your heritage to your children; and at the same time, place all these gifts at the service of the whole community. Above all, "make every effort to preserve the unity which has the Spirit as its origin and peace as its binding force" (*Ibid.* 4, 3). 7. The work of building up the Body of Christ rests upon all of us in the Church. Certainly there is a vital need today for evangelization, and it takes a variety of forms. There are many ways to serve the Gospel. Despite scientific and technological progress, which truly reflects a form of human cooperation in the creative work of God, faith is challenged and even directly opposed by ideologies and life styles which acknowledge neither God nor the moral law. Basic human and Christian values are challenged by crime, violence and terrorism. Honesty and justice in business and public life are often violated. Throughout the world great sums are spent on armaments while millions of poor people struggle for the basic necessities of life. Alcohol and drug abuse take a heavy toll on individuals and on society. The commercial exploitation of sex through pornography offends human dignity and endangers the future of young people. Family life is subjected to powerful pressures as fornication, adultery, divorce and contraception are wrongly regarded as acceptable by many. The unborn are cruelly killed and the lives of the elderly are in serious danger from a mentality that would open the door wide to euthanasia. In the face of all this, however, faithful Christians must not be discouraged, nor can they conform to the spirit of the world. Instead, they are called upon to acknowledge the supremacy of God and his law, to raise their voices and join their efforts on behalf of moral values, to offer society the example of their own upright conduct, and to help those in need. Christians are called to act with the serene conviction that grace is more powerful than sin because of the victory of Christ's Cross. An important part of the mission of evangelization is the task of reconciliation. God "has reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation" (*2 Cor.* 5, 18). For this reason, I am happy that in preparation for my visit to the United States you have made special efforts to promote reconciliation—reconciliation with God, among yourselves and between different races and cultures. In this context too I remind you of Christ's promise in today's Gospel, namely, that when all of us truly listen to his voice, "there shall be *one flock* then, *one shepherd*" (*Io.* 10, 16) 8. Deeply conscious of the truth as it is presented to us in this Liturgy by the word of God, let us exclaim once again with the Psalmist: "God, be gracious to us and bless us, may the light of your face shine upon us" (*Ps.* 67 (66), 2). Who is this God to whom our prayer is addressed? Who is this God whom our community proclaims and to whom our hearts speak? Let us listen once again to the words of the prophet Zephaniah: "Fear not, O Zion, be not discouraged! The Lord, your God, is in your midst, a mighty saviour" (*So.* 3, 16-17). The Mighty One!

It is he whom we invoke here, in this land, which in so many ways manifests the strengths and achievements of humanity, of human genius, of intellect, of knowledge and science, of technology and progress.

Who is this God? Once again let us repeat: the Mighty One!

He who is! (Cfr. *Ex.* 3, 14).

He in whom "we live and move and have our being!" (*Act.* 17, 28).

"The Alpha and the Omega!" (*Apoc.* 1, 8).

He alone is the Mighty One! Because he alone is Love.

Here in this land, in this culture of the most advanced progress and affluence, is not the human person at times insecure and confused about the ultimate meaning of existence—the ultimate meaning of life? Is not the human person at times very far from Love?

Yet only Love saves, and God is Love!

O God of love, O God who saves, "may the light of your face shine upon us!" (*Ps.* 67 (66), 2). Amen. © Copyright 1987 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana