



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO KOREA, PAPUA NEW GUINEA,

SOLOMON ISLANDS AND THAILAND

(MAY 2-11, 1984) MASS WITH THE CONFERRAL

OF THE SACRAMENTS OF BAPTISM AND CONFIRMATION *HOMILY OF POPE JOHN PAUL II* *Municipal*

Stadium Mudung of Kwangju

Friday, 4 May 1984

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

1. I am very pleased to be with you for this celebration of the Eucharist. The Church in Kwangju rejoices in welcoming into its midst *seventy-two new members* through their reception of the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation.

This moment is an important one, not only for those who are about to be baptized and confirmed but also for the Christian community as a whole. The words of our Lord Jesus Christ take on renewed meaning for all of you: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (*Matth. 28, 19*).

Moreover, this event has another deep meaning in that the Church in Korea has presented the occasion for the Bishop of Rome to preside at this Liturgy and to confer these sacraments. In this way there is expressed your *communion with the Church of Rome* and with the Catholic Church throughout the world. As universal Pastor of the Church, I express my deep appreciation to the Bishops of Korea who have extended this invitation to me and to the many priests who have come to concelebrate with me. I join you all in praising God: he never ceases to call men and women of every age to hear the Gospel of salvation and to respond to it in faith by embracing Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour, by being baptized, and by living according to his will.

2. I wish to address my words to those who are about to be baptized and confirmed, and to reflect with them on the meaning of their encounter with Christ in these sacraments.

Our first reading today, taken from Saint Paul's Letter to the Romans, sums up what you as

catechumens are about to experience. Baptism is an *immersion in Christ*: you are buried with Christ into his death so that you may be freed from sin and walk in newness of life. Baptism means that the old self is crucified with Christ. Sin is destroyed; you are liberated from the slavery of sin.

This "death to sin" means a *rebirth in the Holy Spirit*. You are freed from original sin and from all the sins committed before Baptism. You become sharers in the Resurrection, sharers in the new life of Christ. As Saint Paul says, you are "alive to God in Christ Jesus" (*Rom. 6, 11*). You are made like Christ and become adopted children of God through his grace. You are heirs of the eternal life which Christ promised and which he won for us by his own death and Resurrection. This is the *spiritual rebirth* that is brought about by the Sacrament of Baptism - the same rebirth in the Spirit that you catechumens will experience through the symbolic sacramental action of washing with water and the invocation of the Most Holy Trinity.

Make no mistake about it: this is a *radical step* you are about to take, and I know that you have thought deeply about it. It requires you to put aside the old ways of sin in order to live as "children of the light". It calls for joyful confidence in God's mercy and love.

3. "Dying to sin" and "being alive to God in Christ Jesus" is a commitment for your whole life and it requires effort for the future. It means keeping yourselves free, by God's grace, from hatred and rancor. It means pardoning those who may have sinned against you. It means *being reconciled* to one another and to God to forgiveness and love. But forgiveness is an act which is greater than our poor hearts: it belongs to God alone. I am keenly aware of the deep wounds that pain your hearts and souls from personal experiences and from recent tragedies, which are difficult to overcome from a merely human point of view, especially for those of you from Kwangju. Precisely for this reason *the grace of reconciliation has been granted to you* in Baptism: it is a gift of the mercy of God manifested in Jesus Christ, who suffered, died and rose again for us.

This part of Christ's saving message is particularly relevant for those who are haunted by the memory of the unfortunate events of this place. But now you have been conformed to the image and likeness of Christ through Baptism, and each one of you is called to follow the example of *Christ*, the authentic peacemaker and perfect *model for reconciliation*. By accepting the consequences of our baptismal commitment, we become instruments of reconciliation and peace in the midst of dissension and hatred. In this way, as effective *signs of Christ's healing power working through us*, we can ease the pain of injured hearts that are filled with anxiety and bitterness. At the same time we can offer hope to those who suffer from oppression, and thus become instruments of Christian liberation and signs of true freedom.

4. Jesus says in today's Gospel: "If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink" (*Jo. 7, 37*). My dear catechumens, believing in these words of our Lord, you have all come to him today to be baptized into new life.

Thirsting for him who is the fountain of true life, *your admirable ancestors left all to seek him who is all*. Even before they were baptized, from the very moment that they became believers in Jesus, they knowingly and willingly accepted the loss of fortune, fame, family and even life. In truth, they died to sin, enduring even death in this life, so as to live only unto God, their true Father. This deep filial piety, this firm sense of being children of the same Father in Christ, united your ancestors in love and gave them heroic fidelity. Your earliest catechisms and prayers are imbued with this spirit, as eloquently witnessed to by Paul Youn Chin'ung. Just before he was martyred he said: "Once I have come to know that the Lord of Heaven is my Father, I cannot even bear not to follow his commandments".

5. Furthermore, by believing in Christ you have been "made to drink of the one Spirit" ((1 Cor. 12, 13), as Saint Paul says in the second reading. This Spirit is the Spirit of Christ given at Pentecost, after his glorification. And it is this *gift of the Holy Spirit*, which is the sign of the Messianic age, that you will receive today in a special way *in the Sacrament of Confirmation*. Through the power of this Spirit you will be able to follow continually the path that leads you to Christ. Confirmation is the sacrament of *spiritual strengthening*, which complements the spiritual rebirth of your Baptism. In Confirmation you will deepen your friendship with God through an increase of divine grace. This sacramental grace will complete within you the effects of Baptism, enabling you to profess your faith courageously and to defend it, to accept Christ's command to take up your cross daily and follow him. By a special sacramental character, Confirmation will conform you more closely to Christ - prophet, priest and king - and enable you to bear witness to him more faithfully within the Church and before the world. You will be forever sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit.

My dear friends, in the sacraments *Christ* shows himself to be *the Good Shepherd* who watches over and cares for the flock entrusted to him by his heavenly Father. He does this through the Church which administers Baptism and Confirmation "in the person of Christ". In this sacramental service the Church is built up in *the unity of the Holy Spirit*, who works in each person for the good of all.

6. You are seventy-two in number. You symbolize the hundred thousand or more Koreans who by the grace of God are baptized each year into life with Christ and become his witnesses. As Jesus once sent out seventy-two of his disciples, two by two, to spread the Good News of salvation, so you too will be *sent out today to be his heralds*. The gift of Christ's life is a gift to be shared with others in gratitude, so that all may have fullness of life.

As Korean Catholics you have been given *a marvellous heritage* to sustain, guide and inspire you in this mission. Your ancestors not only sought the faith in the midst of persecution; they also spread it to others under the harshest of conditions, often living as outcasts from society. Think of the tireless apostolate of a Paul Chong Hasang, and of the sheer fortitude of the young Peter Yu Taech'ol. Why would anyone have accepted a message fraught with such dire consequences? The answer is simple and clear: they believed in the Gospel message. By their faith and strong

love for Christ they overcame all.

Now it is your turn. Be generous, be strong, be true. Above all, live for others as Jesus did: the Spirit of the Risen Lord is upon you. As baptized and confirmed Christians you are called to share in *the Eucharist*, which is the *source and center of all Christian life*. In the Eucharist, Jesus himself will sustain you along the path of reconciliation and true justice, and lead you to the fullness of life in the Kingdom of his Father, where he lives and reigns with the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever. Amen.

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