



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO CANADA

(SEPTEMBER 9-20, 1984) LITURGY OF THE WORD WITH THE NATIVE PEOPLES OF CANADA *HOMILY OF POPE JOHN PAUL II* *Martyrs' Shrine (Huron)*

Saturday, 15 September 1984 Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

1. Chay! With this traditional Huron word of welcome I greet you all. And I greet you, too, in the name of Jesus Christ who loves you and who has called you out "of every race, language, people and nation" (*Apoc. 5, 9*) to be one in his Body the Church. Truly, Canadians are a people of many races and languages, and thus it gives me great joy to pray with you at this holy place, the Martyrs' Shrine, which stands as a symbol of the unity of faith in a diversity of cultures. I greet those of you who have come from the far North and the rural areas of Ontario, those from the cities to the South, those from outside Ontario and from the United States as well. And in a special way I greet the native peoples of Canada, the descendants of the first inhabitants of this land, the North American Indians.

2. We are gathered at this site in Midland which is of great importance in the history of Canada and in the history of the Church. Here was once located the Shrine of St. Marie which one of my predecessors, Pope Urban VIII, designated in 1644 as a place of pilgrimage, the first of its kind in North America. Here the first Christians of Huronia found a "house of prayer and a home of peace". And here today stands the Martyrs' Shrine, a symbol of hope and faith, a symbol of the triumph of the Cross. The reading from Saint Paul's Letter to the Romans, which we have just heard, helps us to understand the meaning of this holy place, and what it was that gave the martyrs the courage to lay down their lives in this land. It helps us to understand the power that attracted the native peoples to the faith. And this power was "the love of God made visible in Christ Jesus our Lord" (*Rom. 8, 39*).

3. Saint Paul also tells us how firmly he believed in the love of Christ and in its power to overcome all obstacles: "Nothing can come between us and the love of Christ" (*Ibid. 8, 35*). These are words which proceed from the very depths of his being and out of his personal experience as an Apostle. For this great missionary faced many trials and difficulties in his zealous efforts to proclaim the Gospel. To the Corinthians, he writes: "I have been in danger from rivers and in danger from brigands, in danger from my own people and in danger from pagans; in danger in the towns, in danger in the open country, danger at sea and danger from so-called brothers. I have worked and laboured, often without sleep; I have been hungry and thirsty and often starving; I have been in the cold without clothes, and, to leave out much more, there is my daily preoccupations: my anxiety for all the churches" (*2 Cor. 11, 26-28*). And yet, Paul glories in these hardships and says of the, "These are the trials through which we triumph, by the power of him who loved us" (*Rom. 8, 37*). All these hardships he gladly bears because he is convinced of the love of Christ, and that nothing can ever separate him from that love.

4. A similar confidence in God's love guided the lives of the Martyrs who are honoured at this Shrine. They, like Paul, had come to consider the love of Christ as the greatest of all treasures. And they, too, believed that the love of Christ was so strong that nothing could separate them from it, not even persecution and death. The North American Martyrs, then, gave up their lives for the sake of the Gospel - in order to bring the faith to the native people whom they served. In fact, we are told that their faith

was so strong that they yearned and prayed for the grace of martyrdom. Let us recall for a moment these heroic saints who are honoured in this place and who have left us a precious heritage. Six of them were Jesuit priests from France: Jean de Brébeuf, Isaac Jogues, Gabriel Lalemant, Antoine Daniel, Charles Garnier and Noël Chabanel. Fired with love for Christ and inspired by Saint Ignatius of Loyola, Saint Francis Xavier and other great saints of the Society of Jesus, these priests came to the New World to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the native peoples of this land. And they persevered to the end despite difficulties of every sort. Two lay brothers were part of the missionary group: René Goupil and Jean de la Lande. With no less courage and fervour, they assisted the priests in their labours, showed great compassion and care for the Indians, and, laying down their lives, won for themselves the martyr's crown. And as these missionaries laid down their lives, they looked forward to a day when the native people would enjoy full maturity and exercise leadership in their Church. St. John de Brébeuf dreamed of a Church fully Catholic and fully Huron as well. A young woman of Alonquin and Mohawk ancestry also deserves special recognition today: Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha. Who has not heard of her outstanding witness of purity and holiness of life? It was my personal joy, only four years ago, to beatify this woman of great courage and faith, who is known by many as the "Lily of the Mohawks". To those who came to Rome for her beatification I said: "Blessed Kateri stands before us as a symbol of the best of the heritage that is yours as North American Indians" (June 24, 1980).⁵ As we are gathered in prayer today at the Martyr's Shrine, we remember the many efforts of the Church, beginning three and a half centuries ago, to bring the Gospel of Christ into the lives of the native peoples of North America. The Martyrs honoured here are only a small representation of the many men and women who took part in this great missionary effort. We wish to pay tribute as well to all those who joyfully embraced the Christian faith, like Blessed Kateri, and who remained faithful despite many trials and difficulties. Of great importance to the Church of Huronia is Joseph Chiwatenwa, who together with his wife Annetta, his brother Joseph and other family members lived and witnessed to their faith in an heroic manner. Their fidelity is yet another testimony to the truth attested to by the Apostle Paul: "Nothing can ever separate us from the love of Christ". A statue now commemorates the life and mission of Joseph Chiwatenwa. Particularly striking is the testimony of Saint Charles Garnier on the inscription: "It was in this Christian that we had our hope after God". These men and women not only professed the faith and embraced Christ's love, but they in turn became evangelizers and provide even today eloquent models for lay ministry. We also recall how the worthy traditions of the Indian tribes were strengthened and enriched by the Gospel message. These new Christians knew by instinct that the Gospel, far from destroying their authentic values and customs, had the power to purify and uplift the cultural heritage which they had received. During her long history, the Church herself has been constantly enriched by the new traditions which are added to her life and legacy. And today we are grateful for the part that the native peoples play, not only in the multicultural fabric of Canadian society, but in the life of the Catholic Church. Christ himself is incarnate in his Body, the Church. And through her action, the Church desires to assist all people "to bring forth from their own living tradition original expressions of Christian life, celebration and thought" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II, *Catchesi Tradendae*, 53). Thus the one faith is expressed in different ways. There can be no question of adulterating the word of God or of emptying the Cross of its power, but rather of Christ animating the very centre of all culture. Thus, not only is Christianity relevant to the Indian people, but Christ, in the members of his Body, is himself Indian. And the revival of Indian culture will be a revival of those true values which they have inherited and which are purified and ennobled by the Revelation of Jesus Christ. Through his Gospel Christ confirms the native peoples in their belief in God, their awareness of his presence, their ability to discover him in creation, their dependence on him, their desire to worship him, their sense of gratitude for the land, their responsible stewardship of the earth, their reverence for all his great works, their respect for their elders. The world needs to see these values - and so many more that they possess - pursued in the life of the community and made incarnate in a whole people. Finally, it is in the Eucharistic sacrifice that

Christ, joined with his members, offers up to his Father all that makes up their lives and cultures. In his Sacrifice he consolidates all his people in the unity of his Church and calls us all to reconciliation and peace. Comme le bon Samaritain, nous sommes appelés à panser les plaies de notre prochain en détresse. Avec saint Paul, nous devons affirmer: "C'est Dieu qui nous a réconciliés avec lui par le Christ et il nous a donné pour ministère de travailler à cette réconciliation" (2 Cor. 5, 18). Le moment est venu en vérité pour les Canadiens d'apaiser toutes les divisions qui sont survenues au cours des siècles entre les peuples présents à l'origine et ceux qui sont venus ensuite sur ce continent. Cet appel s'adresse à tous les individus et tous les groupes, à toutes les Eglises et les communautés ecclésiales dans l'ensemble du Canada. Une fois encore, disons avec les mots mêmes de saint Paul: "C'est maintenant le moment favorable, c'est maintenant le jour du salut"(2 Cor. 6, 2).⁶ Chers Frères et Sœurs dans le Christ, ce Sanctuaire des Martyrs de Huronia porte témoignage du riche héritage qui a été transmis à toute l'Eglise. Il est aussi un lieu de pèlerinage et de prière, un mémorial des bienfaits que Dieu a accordés dans le passé, une inspiration quand nous nous tournons vers l'avenir. Alors louons Dieu pour sa sollicitude providentielle et pour tout ce dont nous avons hérité du passé! As we go forward, let us commend ourselves to the intercession of the North American Martyrs, to Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha, Saint Joseph, Patron of Canada, and all the Saints, together with Mary the Queen of Saints. And in union with the whole Church - in the richness of her diversity and in the power of her unity - let us all proclaim by the witness of our own lives that "neither death nor life... nor any created thing, can ever come between us and the love of God made visible in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8, 38-39). © Copyright 1984 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana