



The Holy See

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

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Auckland (New Zealand), 22 November 1986

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

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ,

1. I rejoice to be in your midst. Indeed I rejoice that it has been possible for me to come to God's house here, that is, to the People of God, the Church in Auckland, the Church in New Zealand.

The Church here is young. It is less than two centuries since the Good News of Jesus was first preached on these islands. Yet the Catholic faith has been quick to take root and flourish, enriched as it is by a variety of cultures from many parts of the world. Each of those traditions has brought its special gifts; none has come empty handed.

A rich culture already existed in your country before the arrival of the Church or the many immigrants: the culture of the Maori people. This culture has in turn been strengthened and enriched by the uplifting and purifying power of the Gospel.

I wish to extend special greetings to you, the Maori people of Aotearoa, and to thank you for your cordial ceremonial welcome. The strengths of Maori culture are often the very values which modern society is in danger of losing: an acknowledgment of the spiritual dimension in every aspect of life: a profound reverence for nature and the environment; a sense of community, assuring every individual that he or she belongs; loyalty to family and a great willingness to share; an acceptance of death as part of life and a capacity to grieve and mourn the dead in a human way.

As you rightly treasure your culture, let the Gospel of Christ continue to penetrate and permeate it, confirming your sense of identity as a unique part of God's household. It is as Maoris that the Lord calls you; it is as Maoris that you belong to the Church, the one Body of Christ.

I wish also to offer very cordial greetings to our brothers and sisters in Christ belonging to other Christian communions. It is my hope that this pastoral visit to the Church in New Zealand will further the cause of ecumenism and draw us all closer to our one Lord and Saviour.

2. "And now our feet are standing within your gates, O Jerusalem . . . For Israel's law it is, There to praise the Lord's name".

As the Bishop of Rome and the Successor of Saint Peter, I wish to praise the Lord's name with the whole Church that lives here in these islands of the Pacific.

The psalm of praise that we have sung in today's liturgy is a song of pilgrims. And all of us – as the Church of the living God – are a pilgrim people on our way to the "heavenly Jerusalem". Like all pilgrims, we are a people of hope, fully aware of evil and suffering in the world, ourselves tested by temptation and trial, and yet firmly believing that "what we suffer in this life can never be compared to the glory, as yet unravelled, which is waiting for us".

Saint Augustine described the Church as being "like a stranger in a foreign land", which "presses forward amid the persecutions of the world and the consolations of God". As she presses forward, seeking always to be faithful to Christ and the Gospel, she rejoices to experience God's grace, which gives her strength to embrace the Cross as the way to the triumph of the Resurrection. And she finds continued reason to give thanks and praise to God: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Let us then, as pilgrims full of hope, join our hearts and voices in praise of the Most Holy Trinity.

3. In fact, we have great reason to rejoice continually, for we are the people to whom the Father has sent his beloved Son. And today we hear the Son's words to us in the Gospel, just as his contemporaries once heard him as he travelled through Galilee, Judea and Samaria.

Jesus teaches us about God as our loving Father and about Divine Providence.

He draws attention to the beauty of creation and to God's care for it. In this way, he gives his audience a greater awareness of God's goodness: "Think of the flowers; they never have to spin or weave; yet, I assure you, not even Solomon in all his glory was robed like one of these.

At the same time, Jesus points out creation's corruptible and transitory nature, saying: "Now if that is how God clothes the grass in the field which is there today and thrown into the furnace tomorrow, how much more will he look after you". Thus he encourages his listeners to look beyond

created things, however good or beautiful they may be, and to focus on that which does not pass away, on eternity.

Christ then invites his hearers to place their trust in the Father's loving care: "You must not set your hearts on things to eat and things to drink; nor must you worry . . . Your Father well knows you need them. No; set your hearts on his Kingdom".

Peace comes when we learn to rest in God's loving providence, knowing that this world will pass away, and that only his Kingdom will endure. To set our hearts on the things that endure is to be at peace in ourselves.

4. We are followers of Christ just as much as those men and women who first heard these words. We are today's generation of the people whom he redeemed through his own blood. We too have believed that the Father wishes to give us his Kingdom. And we wish to respond to that gift.

Christ says: "There is no need to be afraid, little flock". We must take courage, then, and seek to overcome our fear through the interior power of faith, by setting our hearts first of all on the Kingdom of God. It is precisely in this way that we show ourselves to be the Church. For the Church is the community of people who place their trust in God's promises, promises like those we have heard in today's heard reading from the Prophet Ezekiel.

5. Ezekiel is speaking to a people in exile, separated from their land and their roots. They know that they have strayed from the right path; they have become strangers to God and to one another. But now the Lord promises to bring them home.

He will give them a new heart and a new spirit. They will learn to keep his law, not from outward constraint but from inner conviction. They will discover true peace, for the Lord's own Spirit will be in them "You shall be my people and I will be your God".

How modern this Old Testament writer sounds! His words seem to fit so many people today, alienated from God and estranged from one another. All around us we can see what happens when the Prophet's words go unheeded: if the Spirit of the Lord does not breathe in our hearts, they quickly turn to stone. But the Church is that place where the Holy Spirit breathes, that community of people who are cleansed of their sins in Baptism, and who, though scattered all over the earth, enjoy true communion with one another.

6. What an amazing mystery the Church is! While her members belong to every nation on earth, she remains undivided, always one. The Church is both universal and particular, since her members, though belonging to different cultures and peoples, have received the same Baptism and share in the same Holy Spirit. We are like that group of first believers described in the Acts of the Apostles; we too seek to remain "faithful to the teaching of the Apostles, to the brotherhood, to

the breaking of bread and to the prayers".

In these last four days, I have celebrated the Eucharist with the Church in Bangladesh, the Church in Singapore, the Church in Fiji, and now the Church in New Zealand. In each of these countries the Church has different traditions and customs, different needs and gifts. The Christian faith does not destroy culture, but purifies and uplifts it. It takes away nothing of genuine value from a society or nation, but strengthens whatever is good for the betterment of all.

No particular Church is the same as another, yet the one, holy Catholic and Apostolic Church is present and active in each one. It is not as if the People of God were a loosely-linked International society or even a federation of particular Churches. No, the Holy Spirit himself unites the particular Churches with one another in a communion of life under the headship of Christ our Redeemer. Thus they are called to live together in peace and unity.: And by Christ's design, the Successor of Peter is called to serve all the local Churches through a ministry of faith and charity.

7. Such unity and catholicity in the one Body of Christ must never be taken for granted; it is a gift to be received with gratitude and a gift that requires a response. As the Second Vatican Council stated: " In virtue of this catholicity each individual part of the Church contributes through its special gifts to the good of the other parts and of the whole Church. Thus through the common sharing of gifts and through the common effort to attain fullness in unity, the whole and each of the parts receive increase".

In view of the gift of catholicity, do not the words of Saint Peter apply, not only to individual persons, but also to the particular Churches? "Each one of you", he writes, "has received a special grace, so, like good stewards responsible for all these different graces of God, put yourselves at the service of others". It has always been necessary for local Churches to assist and support one another, especially to assist those who are near and those with the greatest needs. Such actions foster communion among these Churches and show the fruitful nature of the catholicity of the Church.

The gifts of unity and universality also urge us on to greater progress in ecumenism. The desire for complete communion among all Christians has grown remarkably throughout the Catholic Church since the Second Vatican Council. For this we rejoice and give thanks to God. But our prayers for full unity must increase even more. Spiritual and theological dialogue must continue at all levels. And we must, in all appropriate ways, collaborate in endeavours of service and common witness to Christ, so that the Church may be seen by all as the Sacrament of Unity and Reconciliation, and so that she may more effectively further the cause of peace.

8. The Gospel acclamation of today's Mass recalls the words of Saint Paul: "May the peace of Christ reign in your hearts, because it is for this that you were called together as parts of one body". The Apostle's prayer becomes ours today, for we also deeply desire the peace of Christ to

reign in every heart.

The Church is very conscious of people's longing for peace and has taken numerous initiatives to further it. Every year since 1968 she has invited all people of good will to join her on New Year's Day in celebrating the World Day of Peace. And, in addition, Christians in every country, as individuals and together with others, are praying and working for peace.

Jesus said: "Peace I bequeath to you, my own peace I give you, a peace the world cannot give, this is my gift to you". And to all of you today I say: Peace be with you.

In Maori: Kia tau iho te rangimarie o te Ariki ki a koutou. In Samoan: Ia faatasi le Filemu ma outou.

In Tongan: Ke iate Kimoutolu 'a e melino 'a e 'eiki. In Cook Island Maori: Ei a kotou te 'au.

In Polish: Pokoj Wam.

In Croatian: tvlir Stobom.

In Dutch: Vrede zij met u.

In Gaelic: Síochán Dé libh go léir. In Latin: Pax Vobis!

9. Together in peace as members of a pilgrim Church, we wish once again to stand in spirit at the gates of Jerusalem, singing the words of the Psalm:

"For the peace of Jerusalem pray: 'Peace be to your homes! May peace reign in our walls, in your palaces, peace!' 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".

Peace for Jerusalem! Peace for the community of the Church! Peace for the world! Peace which is the fruit of love. And love flourishes where the faithful are united with the Pastors of the Church, where priests work in harmony with the bishop, where the bishops are united in collegial communion among themselves and with the Bishop of Rome.

There is an essential and dynamic link between unity and peace. As Saint Paul tells us: "In Christ Jesus, you that used to be so far apart from us have been brought very close, by the blood of Christ. For he is the peace between us". Christ's love breaks down the hostility and barriers that keep people divided from one another. And through his Holy Spirit, he plants in our hearts the seeds of ecclesial communion. From this interior action of the Holy Spirit, the whole Body of Christ is built up "into one holy temple in the Lord", "into a house where God lives, in the Spirit", into a communion of love and peace.

As brothers and sisters in Christ, as those "whom Christ calls his friends, we proclaim to the world that Jesus "came to bring the good news of peace". The Church carries on the work of Christ in the world, rejoicing in his blessings: especially the blessing of peace.

"Blessed are the peacemakers,

They shall be called children of God". Amen.

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