



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC PILGRIMAGE
TO NORWAY, ICELAND, FINLAND,
DENMARK AND SWEDEN

HOLY MASS IN THE SQUARE ADJACENT AKERSHUS CASTLE

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Oslo (Norway)

Thursday, 1 June 1989

“I will bless the Lord at all times: his praise always on my lips” (Ps. 34, 1)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. For the first time ever the Successor of Saint Peter celebrates the Eucharist in these northern countries. *I am deeply moved.* And I am not alone. I am sure that you too, my fellow members of the household of the faith (Cfr. *Gal. 6, 10*), are profoundly grateful to God for being able to offer *this “thanksgiving” liturgy.* Let us bless him who is our Creator and the Lord of history: God – the Father, Son and Holy Spirit – who has gathered us together for the Eucharist, which is the prayer and sacrifice of Christ himself in union with his body, the Church.

It is for me an extraordinary grace and honour to praise God here, *in Oslo, the capital of Norway, in Northern Europe, in Scandinavia,*

- together with you, Bishop Schwenzer and Bishop Gran, and the other members of the Episcopal Conference of the Nordic Countries,
- with you, the priests, religious and laity of the Diocese of Oslo,
- with you, dear brothers and sisters of the Lutheran community!

The praise of the Lord is on our lips and in our hearts!

2. “You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world... Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (*Matth. 5, 13-14. 16*).

This is the message of the Gospel reading we have just heard. Jesus challenges his followers with *the task of transforming the world, of bringing new light to bear on our human condition* so that good may prevail and God may be honoured. *It is more than a thousand years* since this saving message was first proclaimed in this land. The life and martyrdom of the great Saint Olav marked the “*Baptism*” of the Norwegian peoples. Through Baptism your ancestors were buried in the redemptive death of Christ, and rose with him to a new life.

Christ became their light. Remember and cherish this heritage, which is also the heritage of your country, painted so vividly for the world by your great author, Sigrid Undset.

3. The theme of light and darkness which runs through the whole of Revelation must be particularly dear to the northern peoples, who experience each year more fully than people elsewhere the passage from winter gloom to summer brightness. You are all happy to see the days grow longer and warmer. Scripture uses this very symbolism to indicate the terms of the pilgrimage through history of each individual and of all humanity in the hope of salvation.

“*God is light and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not live according to the truth; but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another*” (*1 Jo. 1, 5-7*).

There is a darkness that is inevitable in life on this earth. There is pain and suffering and death; there are failed hopes and broken promises; there is cruelty and injustice. Modern philosophical thinking has given much attention to the existential and metaphysical aspects *of the anxiety that accompanies human beings on their pilgrim way through life*: the anxiety of a finite existence and of limited human possibilities.

And there is often *another “fear” lurking in our conscience*. It is related to our sense of responsibility for the good and evil that we experience in ourselves and in the world around us. One of the principal documents of the Second Vatican Council describes the human condition in this way: “As a created being, man experiences his limitations in a multitude of ways... As a weak and sinful being, he often does what he would not, and fails to do what he would. And so he finds himself divided, and from this flows much discord in society” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 10). For many people, however, *the “fear” that arises from weakness and sin is a positive step towards conversion and change*.

4. It is the Church's task to help men and women today to face the challenges inherent in their human condition. The first step is *to over-come our reluctance to examine our-selves* and the truths and values on which we build our lives. *What is man?* What is the meaning of suffering, of evil, of death, which have not been eliminated by progress? What is the purposes of progress itself, bought at so high a price? What can we contribute to society? What can we expect from it? What happens after this earthly life is ended? (*Ibid.*)

In response to these questions, "*the Church believes that Christ, who died and was raised up for all, through his Spirit provides man with the light and the strength to measure up to his supreme calling*" (*Gaudium et Spes*). Today it is given to me – the Bishop of Rome and Successor of Saint Peter – to reaffirm this faith, *here in Oslo*: to encourage a serious reflection on the flight from God and from higher moral values which is typical of secularized society.

A thousand years of Christian life has profoundly marked Norwegian society. Your attention to those in need, your care for the handicapped, the weak and the aged, your protection of the rights of women and of minorities, your willingness to share your wealth with the poor of the world, the generosity with which you have opened your frontiers to refugees, and Norway's contribution to peace in the world – these are all values which have grown out of your Christian heritage, out of *Norway's "baptismal grace"*. The challenge facing all Christians in Norway is to bear authentic and convincing witness to *the Gospel message which is the root and support of these values*. "You are the salt... But if the salt loses its flavour, with what shall it be salted?" (*Matth. 5, 13*). Do not be daunted by the enormity of the task. The Lord who has called you will be your strength.

5. *The Lord has called you together.*

My dear Catholic brothers and sisters, sons and daughters of Norway, and all of you who have come from other countries and have made your home here: the words of the Prophet Ezekiel can be applied to you:

"I will take you from the nations, and gather you from all the countries, and bring you into your own land...

and you shall be my people, and I will be your God" (*Ez. 36, 24. 28*).

Gud har samlet dere fra mange lande.

Dios os ha llamada a uniros desde España e America Latina.

Gott hat Euch aus Deutschland hierher gerufen.

Bóg zebrał was z Polski.

Dieu vous a appelés tous ensemble de la France.

Thiên Chúa đã tu họp anh chi em từ Viet Nam.

Bog vas je pozvao iz Hravatske.

Dio vi ha chiamati insieme dall'Italia.

Isten ide vezetett titeket Magyarországról.

God heeft U allen byeengeroepen uit Nederland.

6. "I shall bring you into your own land..."

These are the words which the Prophet said to *the sons and daughters of Israel* taken from their homeland into exile. This is *the historical sense of the Prophet's words*. But there is another sense to his statement, a sense which refers to the more basic "exile" which all the sons and daughters of Adam share on this earth. As Protestants and Catholics journey to their eternal home, is not their true "homeland", *the kingdom of God, already present in the one Church of Christ on earth?*

Two serious and solemn facts face all those who love the Church as the Body of Christ. The first is that the Good News of redemption has not yet been preached to all. The second is the burden of divisions among Christians bequeathed by history. All of us are challenged by the Lord's command: "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation" (*Marc. 16, 15*). The missionary vocation is rooted in the very fact of being Christians. And so too is the call to Church unity. In Norway, *ecumenical relations* have reached a high degree of mutual understanding and collaboration. There remain many difficult questions at the level of faith and doctrine, but your certain trust is that the Spirit "will guide you into all the truth" (*Io. 16, 13*).

As the one who has inherited from Christ the "*Petrine ministry*", I above all must repeat, with humility and fervour, the prayer of Christ at the Last Supper: "Father,... that all may be one... so that the world may believe" (*Ibid. 17, 21*). *Father, Lord of our hearts and of our consciences, make this come about!* You who through the lips of Ezekiel promised your people, "I will give you a new heart and a new spirit", *touch our hearts! Awaken our spirit! Enliven us with the power of a new Pentecost!*

7. The Prophet speaks in God's' name:

"A new heart I will give you and a new spirit I will put within you...

I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes" (*Ez. 36, 26-27*).

In this way *the Lord God himself becomes our strength*.

The Spirit of God – the Spirit of Truth, the Paraclete, the Consoler – *becomes a pilgrim to our hearts, to what is most intimate in our human condition*. Because of this, the "hearts of stone" – insensitive, indifferent, immersed in the here and now, closed to God – become "hearts of flesh", sensitive human hearts which feel the presence and the needs of every brother and sister, *hearts open to God: hearts open to the Word of God – and to the divine ethos*.

For this marvellous transformation.

"Glorify the Lord with me,

Together let us praise his name" (*Ps. 34, 3*).

Is this not God's will? Was this not his providential design when he called us together in this special Eucharistic community?

La meg till slutt prøve å hilse dere på deres eget sprog. Jeg vet at den katolske kirke i Norge favner mer enn nitti forskjellige nasjonaliter. Dette er en stor rikedom og samtidig en utfordring: Å vise verden at Kristi kjærlighet forener oss i ett legeme. Jeg hilser også alle ikkekatolikker som er tilstede her i dag. Be sammen med oss om enhetens gave, slik at vi en dag kan samles rundt et felles nattverdbord.

Gid velsigne dere alle!

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