



The Holy See

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

**HOLY MASS FOR THE FAITHFUL
OF THE PRELATURE OF TROMSØ**

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Stortorget, Tromsø (Norway)
Saturday, 3 June 1989

“How great is your name, O Lord our God, through all the earth!” (Ps. 8, 1).

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. These words of the Psalmist come to mind when we behold the beauty of God’s creation in this land of the Midnight Sun, which shines on the fjords and mountain ranges for all to admire. As we survey the magnificent landscape here *in the far North of Norway* within the Arctic Circle, our thoughts turn *northwards* towards that pole which has attracted so many adventurous travellers and explorers. We also turn *to the South, East and West*: to the other nations of Europe and to other vast continents, including those across the sea. *And with the Psalmist we repeat*: “How great is your name, O Lord our God, through all the earth!” *Creation bears witness*. It speaks of the Creator.

2. It is a great joy for me to join you in giving thanks today for the gifts of Creation and Redemption we have received from God. As chief Pastor of the Catholic Church, I am especially eager *to celebrate the Eucharist with the Catholic people*: with my brother, Bishop Goebel, with the priests and religious who give themselves so generously to the service of the Church in this northern part of Europe, and with all the lay faithful whom they serve.

The roots of Catholic faith in the city of Tromsø are ancient. Already in the early Middle Ages, long before the divisions of a later time, there was *a church here dedicated to the Virgin Mary*. Today there is Our Lady's Church, which serves the Catholic population of Northern Norway. That population includes *not only native Norwegians but Catholic immigrants* as well, who have come here in recent years to establish a new home for themselves and their children. Upon all my Catholic brothers and sisters I invoke an abundance of strength and joy in the Lord.

At the same time I cordially greet those of other Churches and Ecclesial Communities, especially the members of the Lutheran Church, and all people of good will who have come here to pray with the Pope. I hope that my presence will serve to deepen mutual respect and *to promote the unity of all Christians*, in keeping with Christ's prayer "that they may all be one" (*Io. 17, 21*). I also hope that my visit will help to awaken in all hearts a renewed *commitment to the person of Jesus Christ*, the commitment which is the great goal of all the Churches in preaching the Gospel.

3. "When I see the heavens, the work of your hands,
the moon and the stars which you arranged,
what is man...?" (*Ps. 8, 4-5*).

The Psalmist asks God about man. And man, placed within the visible natural world of which he is a part, asks himself: "*Who am I?*" It is necessary for him to ask this question. Of all the visible creatures in the universe, man alone is capable of asking questions about himself and about the world. The question "What is man?" *evokes many different answers*, each of which reflects human experience and human ways of thinking. They are the result of reflection, as well as scientific research. But the Psalmist answers this question *in the light of God's word*. Here is what he has to say about man:

"You have made him little less than a god;
with glory and honour you crowned him,
gave him power over the works of your hand,
put all things under his feet" (*Ps. 8, 6-7*).

These words of the Psalm reflect the first chapter of the Book of Genesis. There we read: "God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth". So *God created man in his own image*, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (*Gen. 1, 26-27*). This is the answer of the Book of Genesis to the question: "What is man?". And just as the Psalmist says, "*You... gave him power over the works of your hand*", so too in Genesis we read that "God blessed them, and God said to them" – to both the man and woman – "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion" (*Ibid. 1, 28*).

4. We see then that the root of *man's vocation in the created world* is to be found in certain fundamental gifts: in *the gift of the person and of the community through mutual love* – in marriage, in the family – in the gift of life. Man, whether male or female, is the only creature that can be called a person. This is because he is the only creature made in the “image and likeness” of God. Just as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit constitute a perfect communion of love, so too each of us is called to enter into loving communion with others through self-giving. Without this relationship we can neither live nor develop our gifts.

In the Book of Genesis we see how this self-giving is mainly realized in marriage: “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it” (*Gen. 1, 26-27*). The love of a married couple unites them, but it also enables them to become cooperators with God in giving life to a new human person. Thus they establish the most basic of human communities, the family. At the same time, Genesis also speaks of *another fundamental gift: the earth, which is given to man* so that he may use its riches in a creative way.

We cannot continue our reflection on God's word in today's liturgy without first asking: “*How well does man use these fundamental gifts?*”. What is the mutual relationship of man and woman today? What of marriage and the family? Are they really a communion of life and love? Again, does man make good use of his dominion over the earth? Is he a conscientious protector of creatures or a brutal exploiter? By misusing the natural environment does he not threaten his own future on this planet?

5. “...*what is man that you should keep him in mind, mortal man that you care for him?*” (*Ps. 8, 5*).

What is he? The Psalmist's question leads us further. It prepares us for the conversation which Christ had with Nicodemus by night: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and of Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God. *That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit*” (*Jo. 3, 5-6*). People are born from their parents – from men and women – according to the flesh. But they must also be born spiritually. The truth is that they are not only flesh but also spirit. *Their destiny* is not only the earth and the created world, but *also the Kingdom of God*. They must therefore be born of the Holy Spirit so as to become, by a supernatural gift, adopted children of God, children “in the Son”. This is the meaning of Baptism, the *sacrament of “water and the Spirit”*, of which Christ speaks in his conversation with Nicodemus. Through the power of the Holy Spirit we *are freed from the inheritance of original sin* and are given the pledge of eternal life in God.

Christ says to Nicodemus: “*God so loved the world that he gave his only Son*, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, *but that the world might be saved through him*” (*Jo. 3, 16-17*). What does it mean to be “saved”? It means to be freed from evil. It means to be freed from the sin that leads away from God, and to be *prepared in Christ for union with God*. For eternal union with God: *for*

eternal life! Christ also revealed to Nicodemus that night the meaning of the Cross on which he was to offer his life for man's redemption. He says: "*the Son of man must be lifted up*" (*Ibid.* 3, 14). And elsewhere Saint John tells us; "By this we know love, that (Christ) laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (*1Jo.* 3, 16).

6. A few moments ago I spoke of love in marriage and family life. But what about people outside the family circle? The example of Christ and his self-sacrifice on the Cross leads us into the very depths of charity, to that *love which embraces not only those who love us, but every human being*, even our enemies. This kind of charity is a gift from God; it is a baptismal gift. Left to ourselves, we may achieve a certain altruism in the name of our common humanity. But as the Second Vatican Council pointed out so prophetically – and we see this verified every day – "*once God is forgotten, the creature is lost sight of as well*" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 36). If we do not love God, known or unknown, we will not love one another.

To you, dear brothers and sisters, has been entrusted a great gift. The light of Christ which never sets has shone upon this land for many generations. It is your privilege to know that his Birth, Death and Resurrection reveal that "God is love" (*1 Jo.* 4, 16). For a Christian, love is not a philosophy or a set of principles, much less an ideology; it is not even a morality as such. For us *love has a personal name, and this name is Jesus Christ!* It is only by entering into a relationship of love with this living person that we can fulfil the purpose for which we were created. It is only by transcending ourselves through faith, by *responding to the divine gift of Baptism into Christ*, that we will find the joy and peace for which the human heart longs.

Dear people of Northern Norway, I beg you: *open the door of your hearts to Christ*. Enter into communion with God through Christ, so that you may be in communion with every human person. Turn to him whose name is love so that you may love others, not because of any mere passing qualities, but because they are created in the image and likeness of God, because they have been redeemed, with you, in the Blood of the Lamb.

7. "What is man that you should keep him in mind?" The *Gospel answers that question* for us. It is a response that surpasses anything that we could hope for or imagine. It encompasses much more than we could ever think about ourselves or could say as a result of all our searching, with all the language of science.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us ask a question here, on this spot, in this city of Tromsø, on the northern edge of Europe, and let it be *directed to the whole continent* and to all the continents and nations of this planet: "What is man?". Down through the centuries *the answer in the Gospel of Christ reaches every generation*. It is the answer of the Paschal Mystery, of *the Cross and Resurrection!*

Truly, "the light has come into the world", but have we not too often *preferred the darkness?* (Cfr.

Io. 3, 19) Why is this so? In Christ's conversation with Nicodemus we find the following answer: "every one who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does what is true comes to the light, that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been wrought in God" (Io. 3, 20-21). We who are baptized into Christ must take his invitation to heart every day of our lives: "While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become children of light" (Ibid. 12, 36). This, dear brothers and sisters, is your vocation and dignity: to be children of light in this land of the Midnight Sun:

- the divine light that shines on creation,
- the light that leads to redemption,
- the everlasting light of Christ.

Kjære kristne!

För jeg avslutter vil jeg gjerne takke dere for invitasjonen til Tromsø.

Min takk og min hilsen gjelder i særlig grad de troende i Tromsø katolske Stift. Men min takk og min hilsen går videre til dere alle som har vært med i denne gudstjenesten for a prise var felles Far och hans Sønn Jesus Kristus i Den hellige And.

Jeg takker myndighetene i denne by som har lagt alt vel til rette (og har passet godt på meg).

Jag har hört om gjestfriheten her i Nord-Norge og har fått oppleve den.

Matte Var Herre Jesus Kristus, Kirkens Herre, före arbeidet for Kirkens enhet videre till malet. Matte Han velsigne denne by og denne landsdel og alle dem som er her. Dette er min bønn for dere.

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