



The Holy See

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

CONFERRAL OF THE SACRAMENT OF CONFIRMATION

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

*“Ice Sports Hall”, Helsinki (Finland)
Monday, 5 June 1989*

*“Every good endowment and every perfect gift is from above,
coming down from the Father of lights” (Jas. 1, 17).*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

1. In this solemn act of worship we celebrate the Eucharist of Jesus Christ. In union with him we give thanks to “the Father of lights” for “every perfect gift”. I join you today in *this great act of thanks-giving*, joyful in the knowledge of all the great gifts of creation and redemption with which God has blessed Finland: your homeland and your heritage. I come as a brother in Christ, as the Successor of the Apostle Peter, to Helsinki, the capital of your beautiful country. This is the first time that a Pope sets foot on Finnish soil. For this gift too I am deeply moved and grateful.

I am happy to celebrate this Liturgy with my brother bishops, especially with *Bishop Verschuren*, to whom I extend heartfelt congratulations in this twenty-fifth year of his Episcopal ministry. My cordial greeting goes to the priests of the Diocese of Helsinki and to all the men and women religious who are Christ’s servants in Finland. Nor may I fail to extend a special greeting to the young people who are to receive the *Sacrament of Confirmation* this afternoon, and to their parents, priests and teachers, who by instruction, good example and prayer have prepared them for this day. Finally, with great joy I welcome the Catholics who have come from Estonia, which

since the Middle Ages has been known as the “land of Mary” – Maarjamaa.

Text in Finnish:

Toivotan Jumalan siunausta koko Suomen kansalle ja sen kauniille kotimaalle. Antakoon Jumala teille armoa ja viisautta rakentaa isänmaatanne rakkaudella ja viisaudella, niin etta teidän nuorisonne voisi luottaen katsoa tulevaisuuteen.

Jag ber att Gud må välsigna alla familjer och alla som uppfostrar barn, så att Finland genom dem kunde bevara sitt kristna arv och sina värdefulla traditioner at kommande generationer.

All the *people of Finland* – those from furthest South to the hardy people of the far North, the Lapps – rightly prize their freedom and independence following the wars and occupations of past centuries. You seek to protect your freedom through a democratic way of life. Drawn together by the rigours of a harsh climate, you have forged a close-knit society which cherishes the ideals of peace, justice and harmony, a society which esteems education in the best traditions of the Finnish scholars who already could be found centuries ago throughout Europe. You have also won international acclaim for helping others to reconcile their disagreements and conflicts. *For all the gifts of nature and grace* that are yours in this country I join you in giving thanks to God, the Father and Creator of us all. And with all my heart I say: *May God protect Finland!*

Jumala varjelkoon Suomea.

Gud beskydde Finland!

2. Dear brothers and sisters: think for a moment of all that God has done for us. Not only has he created us in his image and likeness, giving us life and breath and all the gifts of the created world; as we read today in the Letter of James, he has also “brought us forth by the word of truth” (*1ac. 1, 18*). This “bringing forth” refers to the fact that when we were spiritually dead because of sin, God did not abandon us but brought us back to life. *He created us anew* so that we might be holy in this life and eternally happy with him in the next. We have been given the gift of adoption as God’s own children, sharing divine life.

This gift of redemption is accomplished through “the Word of truth”, the Eternal Son and our Saviour, Jesus Christ. As Saint Peter boldly proclaims in the reading we heard from the Acts of the Apostles, the *Crucified and Risen Christ* “is Lord of all... every one who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name” (*Act. 10, 36. 43*). This is truly the greatest gift of “the Father of lights” to humanity and all creation: *the gift of his Son, “the Word made flesh” (Io. 1, 14)* conceived and born of the Virgin Mary through the power of the Holy Spirit.

3. We also know that before he ascended into heaven, Christ promised the same Spirit to his disciples, “to complete his work on earth and bring us the fullness of grace” (“*Prex Eucharistica*”

IV). On the first Pentecost Sunday this promise was fulfilled when the Apostles received the Holy Spirit in the Upper Room at Jerusalem and immediately began to proclaim the Good News of salvation to people from every nation. Thus the great gift of redemption – our being “brought forth” to divine life – is a mighty work of God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It must be received by us in faith. It must be lived. It must be proclaimed.

Thanks to the preaching of the Gospel that began with the apostles, the message of God’s mighty works reached Finland generations ago. We give thanks today for this too: that *countless sons and daughters of this nation have been reborn to new life* over the centuries through Baptism in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. *The young men and women who are to be confirmed today* can look back to their Christian ancestors who sought with God’s help to live a *life in the Spirit*: a life of love, joy, peace, and patience; a life marked by kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness and self-control. Many Christian models of holiness are known only to their families, neighbours, co-workers and friends. They are people who glorified God in the ordinary circumstances of daily life. Others are part of your national history: figures like *Saint Henrik*, the patron Saint of Finland, who sowed the seeds of faith and gave witness to his love for Christ by the shedding of his blood; and *Blessed Hemming*, the Bishop of Turku, who came on pilgrimage to my predecessor Pope Clement VI to present the message of Saint Birgitta and to plead for peace. They are part of a history of faith that continues with those to be confirmed today.

Text in Finnish:

Rakkaat nuoret ystäväni, jotka otatte vastaan vahvistuksen sakramentin: te olette kerran uudestisyntyneet kasteessa, nyt teidät sidotaan vielä läheisemmin Kristukseen ja vahvistetaan Pyhän Hengen erityisellä voimalla (Cfr. *Lumen Gentium*, 11): viisauden ja ymmärryksen henki, neuvon ja voiman henki, tiedon ja Herran pelon henki. Tämä on erittäin tärkeä päivä kirkon jsenydessänne, koska vahvistettuina katolilaisina teidän odotetaan antautuvan lähetystehtävään, sillä muita Kristuksen luokse. Hän luottaa apuunne maailman muuttamisessa Jumalan perheeksi. Pyhän Paavalin lausumia sanoja opetuslapselleen Timoteukselle voidaan soveltaa teihin. Hän sanoo: çlkään soveltaa teihin. Hän sanoo: Äköön kukaan nuoruuttasi katsoko ylen, vaan ole sinä uskovaisten esikuva puheessa, vaelluksessa, rakkaudessa, uskossa, puhtaudessa" (*1Tim.* 4, 12).

Voitte olla luottavaisia, että Jumala haluaa auttaa teitä täyttämän tämän tehtävän viettää kristityn elämää. Vahvistuksen sakramentista johtuva armo auttaa teitä sanomaan «kyllä» Kristukselle ja «ei» jumalattomuudelle ja synnille. Te kykenette kärsivällisinä kestämään koetukset ja houkutukset, sillä kuten Pyhä Jaakob sanoo meille: «Älköön kukaan, kiusauksessa ollessaan, sanoko: "Jumala minua kiusaa", sillä Jumala ei ole pahan kiusattavissa, eikä hän ketään kiusaa» (*Jac.* 1, 13). Kiusauksen voimaa ei tule aliarvioida, mutta voimme olla varmoja sen voittamisesta Jumalan avulla, jos yritämme joka päivä koko sydämellämme tehdä hyvää ja välttää pahaa. Jumala näyttää meille aina tien, jotta emme lannistuisi tai joutuisi epätoivoon. Kehoitan teitä olemaan uskollisia ja vahvoja, niin, että maailmassa jossa on tarjolla niin monia pinnallisia ja tyhjiä

lupauksia, ette koskaan valitse maalista valtaa, omaisuutta tai huvituksia Kristuksen sijaan. Älkää koskaan vaihtako vapautta joka teillä on Jumalan lapsina, orjuuteen mikä tulee itsekkyydestä ja synnistä.

4. Dear brothers and sisters gathered around this altar and all who hear my voice: “Every good endowment and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights” (*Jac.* 1, 13). The confirmation of these young men and women today reminds those of us who are already confirmed of the promises we made and the gifts we received from above. The endowments and gifts that we enjoy carry a serious responsibility. We must be *stewards of the gifts of creation and redemption* that God has lavished upon us.

One of the great gifts of the Spirit to the Church is *the gift of unity for which Christ prayed* on the eve of his passion and death. We who have been sealed with the Holy Spirit in Baptism and Confirmation must ask what we have done with this gift. Cannot all Christians accept together the challenge of Christian living? Can we not renew together our Baptismal commitment to “turn away from sin and believe in the Gospel”? (Cfr. *Marc.* 1, 15). As members of the one Body of Christ, may we be good stewards of the gift of unity. May we look with confidence and hope to the *restoration of our full communion*. This too can only come as a gift of the Holy Spirit, a mighty act of God for which we must work and pray.

Today’s Gospel parable (Cfr. *Luc.* 19, 11-17) offers an important lesson in stewardship. A servant entrusted with a sum of money increases its value by wise investment and thus earns the praise of his master. If we, like that servant, are “*faithful in small things*” (Cfr. *ibid.* 19, 17), then we too will receive greater, indeed the greatest gift of all: “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 *Cor.* 2, 9).

5. Dear brothers and sisters: here in this “White City of the North”, this “Daughter of the Baltic”, let us *raise our minds and hearts to God* in thanksgiving for all his gifts, and especially for the gift of the Holy Spirit which is to be conferred in the Sacrament of Confirmation.

Let us pray for *the light and strength* that each of us needs to be “good stewards of God’s varied grace... in order that in everything (he) may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen” (1 *Petr.* 4, 10-11).

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