



The Holy See

CONCLUSION OF THE SPECIAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS FOR AUSTRALIA AND OCEANIA

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II 12 December 1998

1. "The love of Christ impels us": *Caritas Christi urget nos* (2 Cor 5: 14). These words of the Apostle Paul guide us in our meditation during this Eucharistic celebration concluding the work of the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Australia and Oceania.

Christ's love spurred the Apostles to every part of the world as evangelization began. It particularly spurred St Paul, called the Apostle of the Nations, because, after his conversion, he brought the Gospel of Christ to many then-known countries. His was the Mediterranean journey of evangelization: from Jerusalem to Rome, through Greece, all the way to Spain.

Later, other routes were opened, expanding the horizons of Christian preaching, as those proclaiming the Gospel came into contact with new lands. Evangelization gradually reached North Africa and Europe north of the Alps, the peoples of the Roman Empire, the Germanic peoples and then the Slavs. The baptism of Rus' began the evangelization not only of Eastern Europe but also, as time passed, of the vast territories beyond the Caucasus. Southern Asia had already been reached by the first generation of missionaries, one of whom was St Thomas, the Apostle of the Indies, according to a tradition very dear to the Christian Communities of that great country.

2. The evangelization of Australia and Oceania took place later, when the great navigators reached that part of the world more distant from Europe. With them, the missionaries came to those lands, bringing the Gospel and often confirming its divine truth by their martyrdom. We need only mention, among others, St Peter Chanel.

We have had the opportunity to re-live all this during these weeks of the Special Assembly for Oceania of the Synod of Bishops. We have tried to do so together Bishops, priests, men and women religious and laity mindful of the words of St Paul: *caritas Christi urget nos*. The general theme guiding us has been: "Jesus Christ and the Peoples of Oceania: Walking His Way, Telling His Truth, Living His Life".

The Year 2000 is fast approaching and before us lies the great event of the Holy Year. Soon we will celebrate the Jubilee marking the second millennium of Christ's birth, which also recalls the beginnings of the Gospel and of the Church. With the birth of Jesus, the Trinitarian mystery of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, entered into human history, in order to make man a new creature in Jesus Christ. In Christ there appeared before the world the great law of love proclaimed in today's liturgy: the new law of the Beatitudes, which we just heard in the Gospel.

As the Year 2000 approaches *tertio millennio adveniente* the Church has become a pilgrim, traveling along the paths of the whole world. She feels a deep need to reflect and in some way to rediscover herself along those paths where the Gospel has journeyed and even "run", revealing Love by the power of Christ's Spirit. Along the paths of the past the history of salvation continues to advance.

3. The Synod which ends today, like the previous Special Assemblies dedicated to the various continents, corresponds precisely to this goal. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever" (*Heb 13: 8*). In reaffirming this, we would like to transmit to the centuries to come and the generations to follow the rich heritage of the evangelization of Oceania. These peoples must, in fact, share fully in the love of Christ which once spurred the heralds of the Good News along all the paths of the world, where they encountered new peoples and new nations who were also called to become heirs to the kingdom of God.

Dear Synod Fathers who are members of this Assembly for Australia and Oceania, I address you with affection and thank you for the work you have done and especially for the witness of communion you have given to me and to the entire Church. I would like to thank Cardinal Schotte and the staff of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops for their service to the particular Churches.

You have come from Australia, New Zealand, the Pacific islands, Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands, bringing the spiritual wealth of your peoples as well as the problems they encounter. In fact, how can we not point out that even in your societies religion faces threats and attempts to isolate it? How can we not stress that at times some people would like to reduce it to an individual experience that can have no influence on social life? You have spoken about the consequences of colonization and immigration, the living conditions of ethnic minorities and the faith problems of young people. The challenges of modernity and secularization were also highlighted; they require pastoral concern and charity in various areas: vocations, justice and peace, the family, ecclesial communion, Catholic education, sacramental life, ecumenism and interreligious dialogue.

4. You have dialogued with one another and have united around the basic theme: Jesus Christ is also the way to follow, the truth to proclaim and the life to live for the peoples of Oceania. The new evangelization follows this programme throughout the world and is carried out in generous co-

operation with the Holy Spirit, who renews the face of the earth (cf. *Ps* 103: 30). Dear friends, in greeting each of you with an embrace of peace, I entrust the Churches in Oceania to the Lord, the Way, the Truth and the Life, and I address them with the words of the prophet Isaiah:

"Sing to the Lord a new song,
his praise from the end of the earth:
Let the sea and what fills it resound,
the coastlands, and those who dwell
in them" (*Is* 42: 10).

May Mary, Mother of the Church, accompany you. May the love of Christ impel you and remain with you always.

Amen!

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