



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT TO THE ARGENTINE NATIONAL CHURCH IN ROME

EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Friday, 13 November 1998

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate and the Priesthood,

Distinguished Authorities,

Dear Brothers and Sisters in the Lord,

1. "Woman, behold, your son" (Jn 19:26). Jesus' words addressed to Mary, his Mother, from the tree of the Cross before the attentive gaze of the disciple John, who recounts them in his Gospel, reveal the Lord's desire to give as Mother to his Church at her birth — the very woman who once conceived him in her immaculate womb through the action and grace of the Holy Spirit. Since then the Christian people have never hesitated to welcome the Virgin Mary with filial love, seeing in her an excellent gift from Christ.

2. This afternoon I come with great joy to visit the Argentine National Church in Rome, to meet you and to celebrate the Word of God with you on the occasion of the enthronement in this church of the image of Our Lady of Luján, which I was pleased to bless during the Argentine Bishops' last *ad limina* visit.

I am grateful to Bishop Estanislao Karlic, President of the Episcopal Conference, for the kind words he addressed to me at the beginning of this celebration in the name of the entire Argentine Episcopate. I return them, once again expressing to you, to Cardinal Raúl Francisco Primatesta, Archbishop of Córdoba and titular of this Church, and to the other Bishops of Argentina, my deep appreciation in the Lord, which I extend to all the priests, religious communities and faithful of your Dioceses. In a certain way they are represented here today through the Argentine colony in Rome, whose pastoral care is provided by the community of priests residing at this church, led by their rector, Fr Antonio Cavalieri.

I respectfully greet the President of the Argentine nation, Dr Carlos Saúl Menem, as well as the members of the

Government and the civil authorities who have accompanied him and have wished to take part in this liturgical celebration, full of symbolic significance because it has taken place in this church which is the spiritual home of Argentine Catholics in the Eternal City and the visible expression of the deep bonds of communion and affection between the beloved Argentine people and the See of Peter. This beautiful church dedicated to Our Lady of Sorrows was built through the persistence of Mons. José León Gallardo, whose remains rest here, and it has the honour of being the first national church in Rome of an American republic. It must therefore continue as the Roman home of all the Argentine faithful, a place of gathering and hospitality, of friendship and fraternal reconciliation.

3. As St Paul teaches us in the first reading, we must give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, because in Christ he has blessed us with every kind of blessing; he has chosen us in him that we might be holy through love; and in the person of the Son he has also destined us to be his adopted children (cf. Eph 1:3-6). Children of God and brothers and sisters of Christ! This is the mystery of divine sonship. From it arise the common dignity and fundamental equality of all Christians, united to one another by the supernatural bonds of brotherhood which are deeper and more lasting than the ideologies, factionalism or group interests of our world.

4. God the Father, rich in mercy, has given his earthly children an Immaculate Mother: the Mother of Jesus. As we heard in the Gospel, high on the Cross, the supreme seat of love and sacrifice, Jesus speaks to his Mother and to the disciple. To his Mother he said: "Woman, behold, your son!". He then said to the disciple: "Behold, your Mother!" (cf. Jn 19:25-27). Looking at Our Lady of Sorrows, who dominates the apse of this church, we can better understand that Mary's new motherhood in the order of grace is the fruit of the love which achieved its full growth at the foot of the cross, through her participation in the Son's redeeming love. In this way Mary acquired a new title on Calvary, which is why she is and can be called the spiritual Mother of her Son's brothers and sisters.

Jesus entrusts us to Mary as our Mother, and Mary receives us all as her children! This is Christ's testament on the Cross. On the one hand, he entrusts the Church to the care of his own Mother; on the other, he entrusts his Mother to the care of the Church. The scene on Calvary reveals to us the secret of true Marian piety, which is a filial love of surrender and gratitude to Mary, a love of imitation and of consecration to her person.

5. Just as St John, the beloved disciple, took Mary into his home, today too the Argentine people take her into their Roman home through the enthronement of her holy image of Luján. To take Mary in, to offer her the throne of our hearts and minds, has a profound meaning which is far deeper than mere sentiment: it is the experience of our own poverty, which turns confidently to Mary's all-powerful pleading with the Father; it is uniting our own will to Mary's, saying "yes" as she did, so that Christ will fully enter our lives. Today, as we enthrone this image of Our Lady, all Argentine Catholics can hear Mary's motherly invitation to renew their love for Christ and to measure themselves by the truth of the Gospel, which renews individuals and institutions; at the end of our life, we will be judged according to our response.

6. Our Lady of Luján, patroness of Argentina, today I kneel before your image as the Pure and Immaculate Conception, together with all the sons and daughters of this beloved land, whose eyes and hearts are focused on you. At the crossroads of the third millennium, I entrust the Argentine nation to you, Holy Mother of Luján: the hopes and yearnings of her people; her families and homes, that they may live in holiness; her children and young people, that they may grow in peace and harmony, and attain the fullness of their human and Christian vocation; I also entrust to you the daily efforts

and shared dialogue of employers, workers and politicians, who find their most authentic inspiration in the Church's social teaching. Take under your protection all who are suffering, the poor, the sick and the marginalized. Make all Argentina faithful to your Son; may it open its heart wide to Christ, the Redeemer of man, the sure hope of humanity.

Our Lady of Luján, help the people of Argentina, support them in their defence of life, console them in their suffering, accompany them in their joys and always help them to raise their eyes to heaven, where the colours of their flag blend with the colours of your immaculate mantle. To you, the Church's honour and praise for ever, Mother of Jesus and our Mother!

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