



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC VOYAGE
OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

MASS AND BEATIFICATION OF THE SERVANT OF GOD IVAN MERZ

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Banja Luka

Sunday, 22 June 2003

1. "*You are the light of the world*". Jesus today repeats these words for us, dear brothers and sisters, for our liturgical assembly. They are not simply a moral exhortation. They are *a statement of fact* which expresses *an essential requirement* flowing from the reception of Baptism.

By virtue of this sacrament human beings become members of the Mystical Body of Christ (cf. Rom 6:3-5). The Apostle Paul states: "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal 3:27). Saint Augustine rightly exclaimed: "Let us rejoice and give thanks: we have become not only Christians but Christ himself... Marvel and rejoice, for we have become Christ" (*In Ioann. Evang. Tract. 21:8, CCL 36:216*).

Christ is "the true light that enlightens every man" (Jn 1:9). Christians for their part are called to become *a reflection of this Light* by following and imitating Jesus. For this reason they will listen to and meditate on Christ's word, take conscious and active part in the Church's liturgical and sacramental life, and carry out the commandment of love by serving their brothers and sisters, especially the helpless, the poor and the suffering.

2. I greet with affection the Bishop of Banja Luka and President of the Episcopal Conference, the Most Reverend Franjo Komarica, and I thank him for his cordial words of greeting at the beginning of this Eucharistic celebration. My respectful greeting also goes to the other Bishops of Bosnia-

Hercegovina, and in particular to Cardinal Vinko Puljić, the Archbishop of Vrhbosna and a native of this Diocese, and to the other Cardinals and Bishops who join us. I greet in the Lord all the pilgrims who have gathered here from different parts of this country and from neighbouring nations.

I send a fraternal greeting to His Beatitude Patriarch Pavle and the Members of the Holy Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church. The new vitality recently gained in our journey towards mutual understanding, reciprocal respect and fraternal solidarity is a cause for joy and hope for this region.

My greetings go also to the members of the other Ecclesial Communities of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and to the members of the Jewish community and the Islamic community.

I greet the Honourable Members of the Presidency of Bosnia-Herzegovina and all the other civil and military Authorities. I very much appreciate your presence and I thank you for all that you have contributed to the organization of my visit to your country.

Finally to you, *the beloved sons and daughters of this pilgrim Church* in Bosnia-Herzegovina, *I open wide my arms* in order to embrace you and tell you that you have an important place in the Pope's heart. He constantly brings before the Lord in prayer the sufferings which still burden your journey and he shares with you in hope the expectation of better days.

From this city, marked in the course of history by so much suffering and bloodshed, I ask Almighty God to have mercy on the sins committed against humanity, human dignity and freedom also by children of the Catholic Church, and to foster in all the desire for mutual forgiveness. Only in a climate of true reconciliation will the memory of so many innocent victims and their sacrifice not be in vain, but encourage everyone to build new relationships of fraternity and understanding.

3. Dear brothers and sisters, *the just man*, surrounded by divine light, becomes in turn *a lamp which radiates light and gives warmth*. This is what we learn today from *the figure of Ivan Merz*.

A gifted young man, he made a good return on his rich natural talents and obtained *great human success*: it can be said that he had *a very successful life*. But that is not the reason why he is today declared Blessed. What makes him one of the choir of the Beati is *his success in God's eyes*. The great aspiration of his whole life was "never to forget God, to desire always to be one with him". In all his activities Ivan Merz sought "the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus" and he allowed Christ to make him his own (cf. Phil 3:8,12).

4. At the school of the liturgy, the source and summit of the Church's life (cf. Sacrosanctum Concilium, 10), Ivan Merz grew to *the fullness of Christian maturity* and became one of the principal *promoters of the liturgical renewal* in his country.

Taking part in Mass and drawing nourishment from the Body of Christ and the Word of God, he drew the inspiration to become an apostle of young people. It was not by chance that he chose as his motto "Sacrifice – Eucharist – Apostolate". Conscious of the vocation he had received in Baptism, he made his whole life a "*race*" towards holiness, the "high standard" of Christian life (cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 31). For this reason, as the First Reading says, "his memory will not disappear, and his name will live through all generations" (Sir 39:9).

5. The name of Ivan Merz has meant in the past a programme of life and of activity *for an entire generation of young Catholics*. Today too it must do the same! Your country and your Church, dear young people, have experienced difficult times and now there is a need to work together so that *life on all levels will fully return to normal*. I therefore appeal to each of you; I invite you not to step back, *not to yield to the temptation to become discouraged*, but to multiply initiatives which will make Bosnia-Herzegovina once more a land of reconciliation, encounter and peace.

The future of this land depends also on you! Do not seek a more comfortable life elsewhere, do not flee from your responsibilities and expect others to resolve problems, but resolutely counter evil with the power of good.

Like Blessed Ivan, strive for *a personal encounter with Christ* which sheds new light on life. May the Gospel be the great ideal guiding your approaches and your decisions! Thus you will become missionaries in word and deed, signs of God's love and credible witnesses of the merciful presence of Christ. Never forget: "one does not light a lamp and put it under a bushel" (cf. Mt 5:15).

6. Dear brothers and sisters who take part with such fervour in this celebration, may the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, keep your heart and your spirit in the knowledge and love of God and of his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ!

This is the prayer and the wish which, through the intercession of Blessed Ivan Merz, the Pope today offers for you and for all the peoples of Bosnia-Herzegovina.