



The Holy See

MESSAGES OF JOHN PAUL II FOR THE OPENING OF THE NATIONAL PASTORAL CONGRESS IN LIVERPOOL

It is with joy that I send you this message of greeting, as you gather in the Cathedral of Christ the King for the opening of your National Pastoral Congress.

Your two thousand delegates - drawn from every part of England and Wales, and including priests, deacons, men and women religious, and laity - have gathered at the invitation of your Bishops and under their guidance. As members of the Pilgrim Church you come together to share information and to take stock of what has so far been done, in fidelity to the Gospel, to implement the decrees of the Second Vatican Council. In this you are following my declared intention when I was made Pope: to be faithful to the Council and to strive to bring it to fruition. May God bless and guide you in this important resolve.

I have been informed of how you have made careful preparations in your dioceses and religious congregations and organizations for this special occasion. Your desire is to achieve a deep spiritual renewal of your lives. You wish to strengthen your common commitment to the mission which our Lord Jesus Christ entrusted to his Church, a mission in which all the People of God share through Baptism and Confirmation. I pray that your work together in these days will bear great fruit. And I invite you to place all your trust in God "whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine".

I send my greetings also to the observers from the other Christian communities who have come to share with their Catholic brothers and sisters in this significant religious celebration. As the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council reminded us: " Let all Christ's faithful remember that the more purely they strive to live according to the Gospel, the more they are fostering and even practising Christian unity".

I greet too the civic authorities and official representatives who are present, and I offer the

expression of respect and friendship to the whole city of Liverpool in the celebration of its centenary.

As these words reach you, I shall be visiting the people of Africa. Mindful of the universality of the Church and of the unity in Christ in which we all share, I ask for your prayers that my pilgrimage of faith will help to build up the entire kingdom of God, and give special encouragement to the Church in Africa.

During these next days, the Congress candle will burn in the sanctuary of your Cathedral as a reminder of our risen life in Christ and of his invitation to us to share in that life. May it also be a sign of your faith, burning brightly as a sign of hope to the world. And may it symbolize your trust in Christ, who is the way and the truth and the life.

May the grace and peace of our Saviour Jesus Christ be with you all.

Venerable Brothers,

Dear brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ,

I am very happy to have this opportunity to speak to you, the delegates to the National Pastoral Congress, as you begin your consideration of important issues affecting the life of the Catholic Church in England and Wales.

You have come together in the name of Jesus Christ. You gather in a spirit of hope and expectation, trusting in the promise of our Saviour: "Where two or three meet in my name, I shall be there with them". You desire, during these days, to evaluate the life and work of the Church, to deepen your prayer, to open your hearts ever wider to the call for constant conversion, to suggest the way forward for the future.

This is a great responsibility and opportunity for all of you. May you carry out your task with courage and humility, seeking the light and strength of the Holy Spirit in order to be faithful to the Gospel. The Catholic people of your countries have a long tradition of faithfulness to Christ and to the See of Peter, as is witnessed in the lives of your martyrs. Let this tradition of faithfulness which you have inherited continue to be the hallmark of your lives.

At the beginning of the Congress I extend my congratulations for the initiative you are taking in shared responsibility. It is an initiative which bears witness to the variety of gifts in the Body of Christ, and to the vital mission of all baptized persons in the Church who, in union with the hierarchy and under their direction, are building up the Kingdom of God.

Shared responsibility in the Church is based upon the conviction that it is one and the same Spirit of truth who directs the hearts of the faithful and who guarantees the Magisterium of the pastors of the flock. In this regard, I would like to recall what I said to a group of Bishops in Rome on the occasion of their ad limina visit: In the community of the faithful - which must always maintain Catholic unity with the Bishops and the Apostolic See - there are great insights of faith. The Holy Spirit is active in enlightening the minds of the faithful with his truth, and in inflaming their hearts with his love. But these insights of faith and this *sensus fidelium* are not independent of the magisterium of the Church which is an instrument of the same Holy Spirit and is assisted by him. It is only when the faithful have been nourished by the word of God, faithfully transmitted in its purity and integrity' that their own charisms are fully operative and fruitful. Once the word of God is faithfully proclaimed to the community and is accepted, it brings forth fruits of justice and holiness of life in abundance".

From the time of my election to the Chair of Peter, I have considered it to be my duty to continue the work of the Second Vatican Council. In order to fulfil this task I have felt the need to call attention to the Church's understanding of her own nature and mission, as set out in the Magna Charta of the Council, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church "Lumen Gentium". Again and again we need to ponder the mystery of the Church, striving to appreciate ever more keenly this visible community of faith, hope and charity through which Christ communicates truth and grace to all men and women.

On this occasion I ask each of you to meditate on the mystery of the Church and to ponder the marvellous ways in which God's saving power is effected through her. Consider your own role in the mission of the Church, whether it be as a priest, deacon, religious or lay-person. For each baptized person is called to participate actively in the Church's mission so that in our day she may make her presence felt in action. Above all let us realize that the Church is a community of prayer.

It is especially in prayer that Jesus unites us to himself in his work of salvation and service.

Brothers and sisters in Christ: "tot us not lose sight of Jesus who leads us in our faith and brings it to perfection". Let us not lose sight of his guiding word. Let us not lose sight of his Spirit abiding in our hearts. In everything, trust in Jesus. Trust in his grace working within you and inviting you to sacrifice and holiness. Trust in his presence in the Eucharist and in the whole Church. Trust in the power of his Gospel to be the light which will lead you into the future. "tot the message of Christ in all its richness find a home in you"; for it is his justice, his compassion, his love which you bring to the world.

Again I ask Almighty God to bless and guide you, and to keep you close for ever to Christ, who is the way and the truth and the life. Together let us look forward to the day when - perhaps in your own dear land - rejoicing in the title of Mary's dowry, we may sing together the hymn composed for your Congress:

"Truth on my tongue, his way to guide my walking -And I shall live, not I but Christ in me".

And it is in the name of Christ that I bless you all: in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Friday, 2 May 1980