



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO AUSTRIA (JUNE 19-21, 1998)

***ADDRESS OF POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE CONFERENCE OF AUSTRIAN BISHOPS***

Sunday, 21 June 1998

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

1. I am grateful that this meeting gives us an opportunity to reflect in fraternal communion on the responsibility we bear on our shoulders as Successors of the Apostles. I cordially greet you all, as a college and as individuals. I make St Peter's words my own: "By God's power [you] are guarded through faith. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while you may have to suffer various trials" (1 Pt 1:5-6).

2. You have been tested in various ways. Even if this is not the time to attempt an overall evaluation, I would like nonetheless to admit that in this entire period I have kept you particularly present in my prayers. As a travelling companion in difficult times, my heart beats constantly in Rome for those who have been entrusted with the pastoral care of this beloved country. As I pray before the Blessed Sacrament, I have often commended you to the Lord, together with your priests, deacons and co-workers in the care of souls, as well as the men and women entrusted to you, young and old, believers, sceptics and the discouraged. My presence among you today gives me the opportunity to visibly demonstrate this continuous closeness in spirit. Thus you will be better able to feel the full affection with which I support you. In fact, I "work with you for your joy" (2 Cor 1:24).

On our personal journey, as on the road which the Church takes through history, there are stretches where it is difficult to bear witness to joy. There are times when the tangle of thorny problems makes it particularly difficult for us to exercise our ministry, also because it is subject to misinterpretations and misunderstandings. However painful these experiences may be, we have the common duty to "preach good news" (Rom 10:15) to the Church and to the world, and to all those expecting great things from the third millennium now close at hand. When the Episcopal ministry weighs heavily on our

shoulders as a burden rather than a dignity, it is advisable to turn our hearts and minds back to the beginning, gratefully recalling it to revive the grace which was transmitted to us by the laying on of hands. “God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and self-control” (2 Tm 1:6-7).

3. Thinking back to the day when hands were laid upon us to ordain us first priests and then Bishops, we relive the eloquent dialogue in which, before being ordained, we gave our *Adsum* before the Bishop: *I am ready and willing*. In this dialogue it was not we who were the first to speak. Our part was to give a generous reply: I am ready to put myself at the Lord’s service with my gifts and abilities, with my hopes and efforts, with my lights and shadows. We kept all this in mind when we joyously said that *Adsum*.

This word of willingness, unequivocally expressed in public by each of us, took on new meaning for me when, as a young Bishop during the Second Vatican Council, I had the opportunity to repeat it with the other members of that ecumenical assembly: *Adsumus, Domine, Sancte Spiritus!* Here we are Lord, Holy Spirit! All the Council’s sessions began with these words. In this prayer I experienced and understood that the personal *Adsum* was part of the community’s *Adsumus*. Just as the Lord Jesus, after calling his Apostles by their own names, also constituted them as the “Twelve” (cf. Mk 3:13-19), the Lord’s call and the generous response of each one represent the basis of our personal dedication to forming a steadfast community, sealed by the laying on of hands and by prayer. This community is created by the Lord’s call and the mission to carry out a shared task. In fact, since the Church’s origins, the pastoral ministry has not been conferred only on individuals taken separately, but on each one considered as part of a whole, of a college. Therefore we can rightly say *Adsumus*. We are ready. *One* Bishop alone cannot achieve Christ’s plan. The Bishops united with one another and with Christ in their midst constitute the full subject of pastoral ministry in the Church, according to the Founder’s plan.

4. The close link between the *Adsum* and the *Adsumus* invites us to reflect on the practical ways to express communion in our day. Just as each community must make room for the individual’s development, so within the *Adsumus* even the distinctive *Adsum* has its own right and place. Deep respect for the vocation and mission proper to each is also necessary in the community. In the area of what is common to all, the individual Bishop must have the opportunity to express himself and to exercise his proper pastoral responsibility. Apart from the differences in abilities and personal qualities of individual Bishops, they are invested with their own authority and are rightly said to be prelates of the people they govern (cf. *Lumen gentium*, n. 27). This authority, exercised personally in the name of Christ, is not, however, aimed at domination, but takes its example from the Good Shepherd who came not to be served, but to serve (cf. Mt 20:28). The words of St Peter are addressed to each Bishop: “Not as domineering over those in your charge but being examples to the flock” (cf. 1 Pt 5:3).

The *Adsumus*, which leaves fitting room for the *Adsum* of the individual, must also be expressed in the common effort of all to stay united. Otherwise the one Magisterium of Christ would disintegrate into a variety of individual voices. Harmony would be replaced by noisy confusion. This is not appropriate for those who find themselves in the long line of apostolic succession, whose origins date back to the Lord of the Church herself. A close union with Christ means mutual responsibility. Therefore, Episcopal work includes support for one another in the pastoral ministry, in fraternal interchange, in public life and, not last, in prayer for one another. It is good for each to know that he is not alone. A valuable help to this end is the Bishops’ Conference, which, as the Second Vatican Council desired, should foster “a holy joining of forces for the common good of the Church” (*Christus Dominus*, n. 37) through an exchange of information,

experiences and mutual consultation. As Pastors of the flocks entrusted to you, you stand together before God, linked to one another in collegial communion to which each makes his distinctive contribution. A beautiful sign that in your respective Dioceses you are jointly leading the pilgrim People of God in Austria would be for you to devote a few days together to spiritual exercises as a Bishops' Conference.

5. The *Adsumus* at the Council was not only a prayer, but also a programme. When the Bishops gathered as a community in prayer at the Council, they also became a community in dialogue under the protection and assistance of the Holy Spirit. It is therefore not surprising that the relationship of the Triune God with man should be described as a dialogue (cf. *Gaudium et spes*, n. 19; *Dei Verbum*, nn. 8, 12, 25). In the light of the mystery of salvation, the Church's mission is fulfilled in the form of dialogue. In Christ, the one Mediator between God and man, the Church, his Mystical Body, finds her place as a universal sacrament of salvation for the world (*Lumen gentium*, nn. 1, 9, 48, 59; *Gaudium et spes*, nn. 42, 45; *Ad gentes*, n. 15; *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, nn. 5, 26).

It is therefore the Church's task to carry on a "dialogue of salvation" internally and externally, so that all may see in her "the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph 3:8). I have been committed to this dialogue from the very beginning of my Pontificate, seeking to contribute to it during the almost 20 years of my ministry (cf. *Redemptor hominis*, n. 4). In this regard, I am pleased to recall my Predecessor of venerable memory, Pope Paul VI, who devoted his first Encyclical *Ecclesiam suam* to the theme of sincere dialogue, at the same time establishing competent and effective organs for this dialogue. In these years I have sought to use these organs to further dialogue, especially in those areas which have experienced the greatest difficulties (cf. most recently the Encyclical *Ut unum sint*, nn. 28-29).

With deep appreciation, I look at the numerous structures that in many areas give concrete form to the Church's dialogue, both internally and externally, and make it so fruitful. You too, dear Brothers, at the level of your Bishops' Conference, have taken up an initiative which aims to stimulate and deepen dialogue. With the *Dialog für Österreich* you intend to foster joint discussion between the local Churches you head, the orders, religious communities, movements and groups. With this aim, you have widened the circle of possible partners in dialogue and have turned to the parish councils and "apostolic groups", to public bodies and associations, as well as to individuals and communities (cf. *Grundtext zum "Dialog für Österreich"*, p. 3).

6. With this dialogue initiative, from which you want no one to be excluded, not only do you intend to encourage a very civilized way of relating today or a neutral method for bringing people together. Dialogue can take a wide range of forms. There are friendly exchanges of ideas, objective considerations, scientific discussions or processes for building social consensus. Although in recent decades the term "dialogue" has suffered certain misunderstandings and distortions, it must not be discredited. Dialogue conducted by the Church and invited by her is never an innocuous form of openness to the world nor a sort of superficial adaptation. It is meant, instead, as a way of speaking and acting supported by God's action and marked by faith in the Church. In this sense the *Dialog für Österreich* must become a "dialogue of salvation". It would be too shallow were it to take place at an exclusively horizontal level, limited to an exchange of viewpoints in the sense of a stimulating conversation. Instead it should be open to a vertical dimension which leads it towards the Saviour of the world and the Lord of history, who reconciles us with God and with one another (cf. Encyclical *Ut unum sint*, n. 35).

7. This sort of dialogue is a challenge for all those taking part in it, a real form of spiritual experiment. It is a question of

listening to the other and of opening oneself in personal witness, but also of learning to risk, leaving the outcome of the dialogue to God. Dialogue, as opposed to superficial conversation, aims at the shared discovery and recognition of the truth. How often, Pastors, have you tried and are still trying to lead the priests and lay people entrusted to your care to the truth through a patient and loving dialogue! You know from experience that a successfully concluded dialogue can put an end to a problem or a controversy previously unresolved. At the same time, however, you sometimes experience the painful failure of your efforts: instead of leading to truth and understanding, the dialogue does not go beyond an unsubstantial conversation which, in the end, is uninterested in the truth.

This idea does not correspond to the dialogue of salvation, which for everyone who takes part always stands under the Word of God. It therefore presupposes a minimum of shared communication and basic unity. It is the living faith transmitted by the universal Church which represents the basis of dialogue for all the parties. Anyone who abandons this common basis denies every dialogue in the Church the pre-requisite for becoming a dialogue of salvation. It is therefore important to know whether a particular disagreement might possibly be traced to fundamental differences. Should this be the case, such differences must first be resolved. Otherwise the dialogue risks being reduced to vagueness or evaporating into marginal hair-splitting. In any case, no one can sincerely take a role in a dialogue process if he is not ready to open himself to the truth and to grow increasingly in it.

Openness to the truth means willingness to change. Indeed, dialogue will lead to the truth only when, in addition to the necessary understanding of the issue, it takes place with sincerity and honesty, with willingness to hear the truth and to correct oneself. Without readiness to be converted to the truth, every dialogue atrophies. A dubious compromise would be a mockery. It must therefore be guaranteed that the parties' agreement is not merely feigned or reached by deception, but stems from the heart. In this context, Pastors, your task is the discernment by which you become "fellow workers in the truth" (3 Jn 8).

8. The dialogue of salvation is a spiritual undertaking. It deepens the insight into the richness of the ecclesial community and the mystery of faith. For those who are seriously involved in it, it creates a place for communication in the truth. Those taking part experience it as an "exchange of gifts" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 13). If dialogue takes place convincingly in a community, it has an external effect. Dialogue is thus a useful pastoral tool for evangelization. In fact, an authentic dialogue has a radiating force. Obviously, it must be undertaken with honesty. However open one wants to be, the profession of ecclesial faith must remain uncompromising. Interlocutors with clear contours have the best chance to make themselves understood and to meet with sincere respect, even if dialogue on a specific point can be difficult and tiring, and the opposite party is not initially willing to accept the viewpoint presented.

9. It is nevertheless clear that in encouraging dialogue I do not simply mean that we should talk more. Today a lot is said, but this does not necessarily facilitate mutual understanding. Unfortunately, dialogue can also fail. I would therefore like to point out two dangers in particular which are certainly not unknown to you.

The first danger is the demand for power. This is the case when the parties in dialogue are not guided by the intention to understand, but claim the whole realm of dialogue for themselves alone. With this approach, soon there is no open exchange. Enriching diversity becomes aggressive opposition seeking a stage to present its own monologue. A cold wall is erected between the interlocutors, separating worlds closed in on themselves. Demands, threats and dictates replace

sincere common searching. This clashes with the meaning of the dialogue of salvation, which requires the believer's readiness to respond to anyone who asks him to account for his hope, remembering what the Apostle Peter advised, that it be done with gentleness and reverence (cf. 1 Pt 3:15f.).

Another danger is the interference of public opinion while the dialogue is in progress. The Church in our time is striving more and more to become a "glass house", transparent and credible. And that is to be welcomed. But since every house has special rooms which from the outset are not open to all the guests, so the Church's family dialogue can and should have rooms for conversation behind closed doors. This has nothing to do with secrecy, but with mutual respect to the advantage of the question being examined. In fact, the success of the dialogue is jeopardized if it takes place before a public insufficiently qualified or prepared, and with the use of the not always impartial mass media. Rash or inappropriate attention from the public can seriously interfere with a dialogue process which is promising in itself.

In view of these dangers, it will be your concern to continue your dialogues of salvation with sensitivity and deep respect. The Church in Austria must be more and more "a sign of brotherhood which allows and strengthens sincere dialogue. Above all, such a mission requires the Church herself to foster respect, mutual esteem and harmony, acknowledging all legitimate diversity. In this way, all who constitute the one People of God will be able to engage in ever more fruitful dialogue, whether they are pastors or other members of the faithful. For the ties which unite the faithful together are stronger than those which separate them: let there be unity in what is necessary, freedom in what is doubtful, and charity in everything (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 92).

10. Dear Brothers in the Episcopate, after opening my heart to you today and confiding to you my thoughts and concerns about the Church in your beloved country, I would like to conclude by urging you: create space within you for the Holy Spirit! Let us imitate the Blessed Virgin Mary, whose life was a dialogue of salvation. In the Holy Spirit she conceived the Word so that he could become flesh. Let us learn from her who stood calmly and silently beneath the Cross until the end, when he gave up his Spirit for us men. Let us turn our gaze to her who was praying with the Apostles when they implored the Holy Spirit to come down upon the newborn Church. The Virgin Mary is not only the one who intercedes for us; she is also our model of life in the Holy Spirit. We can learn from her how to work together for the world's salvation. Thus we will become co-workers in joy and truth. Just as the Virgin Mary called herself the "handmaid of the Lord" (Lk 1:38), we too are humble "ministers of Christ" and faithful "stewards of the mysteries of God" (1 Cor 4:1).

From my heart I ask you: do not give up the dialogue! In the future as well, I will be close to you in prayer. *May they all be one, so that Austria may believe!* With this wish I cordially give you my Apostolic Blessing.