



The Holy See

GENERAL AUDIENCE OF JOHN PAUL II

Wednesday, 11 June 2003

Comment on his Apostolic Visit to Croatia

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. Today I would like to go back in spirit and review with you the *journey to Croatia* which I was able to make a few days ago and whose theme was, "*The Family: the Way of the Church and of People*". It was my *100th Apostolic Visit!* I raise my deepest, most heartfelt thanks to the Lord, who has opened the highways of the world and of nations to me a hundred times so that I might bear witness to him.

I returned to the noble land of Croatia to strengthen my brothers and sisters in the faith; I wanted to take a message of peace and reconciliation to all of them, and I was granted the joy of raising to the honour of the altars Sr Marija Propetoga Isusa Petkovic.

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the Episcopate for inviting me and for their attentive and affectionate welcome. I also extend my gratitude to the President of the Republic and the other civil and military Authorities for their courteous attendance and prompt cooperation. Lastly, I thank the Archdiocese of Rijeka and its Seminary for its hospitality to me and my collaborators.

2. My first stop was the ancient and glorious city of *Dubrovnik*, proud of its history and its tradition of freedom and justice. I celebrated holy Mass there, during which I *beatified Sr Marija of Jesus Crucified Petkovic*, an outstanding daughter of the Church in Croatia. She was a woman endowed with a heroic desire to serve God in the poorest of her brethren and founded the Daughters of Mercy of the Third Order Regular of St Francis to spread knowledge of divine Love through spiritual and concrete works of mercy.

In the light of this admirable figure, I addressed a special Message *to Croatian women*, whom I encouraged to make their spiritual and moral contribution to the Church and to society; in particular, I asked consecrated women to be an eloquent sign of God's loving presence among people.

3. The next day in *Osijek*, Diocese of Djakovo and Srijem, in the extreme northeast of the country, I had the pleasure of presiding at the solemn closure of the *Second Diocesan Synod* and of commemorating the 150th anniversary of the foundation of the ecclesiastical Province of Zagreb. On that occasion, I paused to reflect *on holiness as the vocation of every Christian*: this is one of the central teachings of the Second Vatican Council. I invited the lay faithful in particular to take full advantage of the grace of Baptism and Confirmation. Only persons motivated by strong faith and generous love can be apostles of reconciliation and moral reconstruction, where the wounds of a painful and difficult past are still unhealed.

In Djakovo, I paid a brief visit to the beautiful cathedral, where I greeted the seminarians and their teachers, together with a huge group of religious.

4. On Sunday, 8 June, the Feast of Pentecost, at holy Mass in *Rijeka* I prayed for a new outpouring of the gifts of the Holy Spirit *upon the Christian families of Croatia and of the world*. I wanted to place them all under the special protection of the Holy Family of Nazareth. Indeed, I felt it was appropriate to reassert the primary social value of the family institution, asking that it receive priority attention and that concrete provisions be made to encourage its constitution, development and stability.

In the afternoon, I went to the *Shrine of Trsat*, on a hill of the city of Rijeka, to join in spirit the pilgrims who venerate the Mother of God there. In fact, a pious tradition claims that the Holy House of Nazareth paused here before reaching Loreto.

5. My last stop was Zadar in Dalmatia, a city rich in history. In the shade of the Cathedral of St Anastasia, martyr of Sirmio, I celebrated *the Hour of Sext* on the feast of the *Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church*. This Marian feast day that extends the Solemnity of Pentecost enabled us once again to breathe the atmosphere of the Upper Room. As she was then, today too, Mary continues to be present in the ecclesial community: *a humble and discreet presence*, but one which enlivens prayer and life according to the Spirit; *a contemplative presence*, which can remind pastors and faithful of the prime importance of interiority, of listening to and assimilating the Word of God, an essential condition for a convinced and effective proclamation of the Gospel.

Dear brothers and sisters, during this visit, I could see *how much Christianity has contributed* to the development of art and culture in Croatia, and especially to the spirituality and morals of Croatia and its people. On these firm foundations, now, at the start of the third millennium, the beloved Croatian nation can continue to build its *unity and stability*, to integrate itself *into the*

concert of the European peoples.

May God continue to bless and protect Croatia! It will always have a privileged place in my heart and prayers.

To the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors

I offer special greetings to the English-speaking visitors present today. Upon all of you, especially those from England, the West Indies and the United States of America, I invoke the grace and peace of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

To young people, the sick and newly-weds

I now address a special thought to the *young people*, the *sick* and the *newly-weds*.

May the witness of the Apostle St Barnabas whose feast we are celebrating today be for you, dear *young people*, an encouragement always to walk in accordance with the Spirit of the Risen Jesus, whom we celebrated at the Solemnity of Pentecost; may it be for you, dear *sick people*, a support in adhering to God's will; may it help you, dear *newly-weds*, to be generous witnesses of Christ's love.