



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
TO THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC,
MEXICO AND THE BAHAMAS

EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II *Mexico, Oaxaca Cathedral*

Monday, 29 January 1979

Beloved Brothers and Sisters,

This ceremony, in which, with immense joy, I confer some sacred ministries on descendants of the ancient races of this land of America, confirms the truth of a saying of a high personality of your country to my venerated predecessor Paul VI: from the beginning of the history of the American nations it was above all the Church that protected the most humble, their dignity and value as human persons.

Today the truth of this affirmation receives a new confirmation, now that the Bishop of Rome and Pastor of the universal Church will call some of them to collaborate with his pastors in service of the ecclesial community, for its greater growth and vitality (cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 73).

1. It is well known that these ministries do not change laymen into ecclesiastics: those who receive them continue to be laymen, that is, they do not leave the state in which they were living when they were called (cf. 1 Cor 7:20). And even when they cooperate, as substitutes or helpers, with consecrated ministers, these laymen are, above all, collaborators of God (cf. 1 Cor 3:9), who avails himself also of them to carry out his will to save all men (cf. 1 Tim 2:4).

What is more, precisely because these laymen commit themselves deliberately to this plan of salvation, to such an extent that this commitment is for them the ultimate reason of their presence in the world (cf. St John Chrysostom, *In Act. Ap.* 20:4), they must be considered as archetypes of the participation of all the faithful in the Church's mission of salvation.

2. Actually, all the faithful, by virtue of their baptism and of the sacrament of confirmation, must

profess publicly the faith received from God by means of the Church, spread it and defend it as true witnesses of Christ (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 11). That is, they are called to evangelization, which is a fundamental duty of all the members of the people of God (cf. *Ad Gentes*, 35), whether or not they have special functions more closely connected with the duties of Pastors (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 24).

In this connection let the successor of Peter make a fervent appeal to one and all to assimilate and practise the teachings and directions of the Second Vatican Council, which dedicated to the laity chapter 4 of the dogmatic constitution *Lumen Gentium*, and the decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem*.

I also wish, as a memory of my passing in your midst, though also with my eyes fixed on the faithful of the whole world, to refer briefly to what is peculiar to the cooperation of the laity in the one apostolate of the Church, its expressions, both individual and associated, its determinant characteristic. To do so, I will take inspiration from the invocation to Christ which we read in the prayer of Lauds of this Monday of the fourth week of ordinary liturgical time: "You who operate with the Father in the history of humanity, renew men and things with the force of your Spirit".

In fact, the laity, who by divine vocation participate in the entire reality of the world, instilling into it their faith, which has become a reality in their own public and private life (cf. James 2:17), are the most immediate protagonists of the renewal of men and of things. With their active presence as believers, they work at the progressive consecration of the world to God (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 34). This presence is linked with the whole economy of the Christian religion, which is, indeed, a doctrine, but is above all an event: the event of the Incarnation, Jesus, the God-man who recapitulated in himself the universe (cf. Eph 1:10). It corresponds to the example of Christ, who made physical contact, too, a vehicle of communication of his restoring power (cf. Mk 1:41 and 7:33; Mt 9:29 ff. and 20:34; Lk 7:14 and 8:54). It is inherent in the sacramental nature of the Church, which, having been made a sign and instrument of the union of men with God and of the unity of the whole of mankind (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 1), has been called by God to be in permanent communion with the world in order to be in it the leaven that transforms it from within (cf. Mt 13:33)

The apostolate of the laity, understood and put into practice, in this way, gives to all the events of human history their full meaning, respecting their autonomy and encouraging the progress required by the very nature of each of them. At the same time, it gives us the key to interpret fully the meaning of history, since all temporal realities, like the events that manifest them, take on their deepest meaning in the spiritual dimension that establishes the relationship between the present and the future (Heb 13:14). Disregard or mutilation of this dimension would become, in fact, an attack on the very essence of man.

3. On leaving this land, I take with me a pleasant memory of you, that of having met generous souls who, from now, will offer their lives for the spreading of the kingdom of God. At the same time I am sure that, like trees planted near rivers, they will yield abundant fruit in due course (cf.

Ps 1:3) for the consolidation of the Gospel.

Take heart! Be the leaven in the dough (Mt 13:33), form the Church! May your witness arouse everywhere other heralds of salvation: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach good news!" (Rom 10:15). Let us thank God who "began a good work in you (and) will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil 1:6).

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