



# The Holy See

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## APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

### HOLY MASS AT YANKEE STADIUM

### *HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II*

*New York*

*Tuesday, 2 October 1979*

1. "Peace be with you !"

These were the first words that Jesus spoke to his Apostles after his Resurrection. With these words the Risen Christ restored peace to their hearts, at a time when they were still in a state of shock after the first terrible experience of Good Friday. Tonight, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, in the power of his Spirit, in the midst of a world that is anxious about its own existence, I repeat these words to you, for they are words of life: "Peace be with you !"

Jesus does not merely give us peace. He gives us *his* Peace accompanied by *his* Justice. He *is* Peace and Justice. He becomes *our* Peace and *our* Justice.

What does this mean? It means that Jesus Christ—the Son of God made man, the perfect man—perfects, restores and manifests in himself the unsurpassable dignity that God wishes to give to man from the beginning. He is the one who realizes in himself what man has the vocation to be: the one who is fully reconciled with the Father, fully one in himself, fully devoted to others. Jesus Christ is living Peace and living Justice.

Jesus Christ makes us sharers in what he is. Through his Incarnation, the Son of God in a certain manner united himself with every human being. In our inmost being he has recreated us; in our inmost being he has reconciled us with God, reconciled us with ourselves, reconciled us with our brothers and sisters: he is *our* Peace.

2. What unfathomable riches we bear within us, and in our Christian communities! We are bearers of the Justice and Peace of God! We are not primarily painstaking builders of a justice and peace that are merely human, always wearing out and always fragile. We are primarily the humble beneficiaries of the very life of God, who is Justice and Peace in the bond of Charity. During Mass, when the priest greets us with these words: "the peace of the Lord be with you always", let us think primarily of this Peace which is God's gift : Jesus Christ our Peace. And when, before Communion, the priest invites us to give one another a sign of peace, let us think primarily of the fact that we are invited to exchange with one another the Peace of Christ, who dwells within us, who invites us to share in his Body and Blood, for our joy and for the service of all humanity.

For God's Justice and Peace cry out to bear fruit in human works of justice and peace, in all the spheres of actual life. When we Christians make Jesus Christ the center of our feelings and thoughts, we do not turn away from people and their needs. On the contrary, we are caught up in the eternal movement of God's love that comes to meet us; we are caught up in the movement of the Son, who came among us, who became one of us; we are caught up in the movement of the Holy Spirit, who visits the poor, calms fevered hearts, binds up wounded hearts, warms cold hearts, and gives us the fullness of his gifts. The reason why man is the primary and fundamental way for the Church is that the Church walks in the footsteps of Jesus: it is Jesus who has shown her this road. This road passes in an unchangeable way through the mystery of the Incarnation and Redemption; it leads from Christ to man. The Church looks at the world through the very eyes of Christ; Jesus is the principle of her solicitude for man (cf. *Redemptor Hominis*, 13-18).

3. The task is immense. And it is an enthralling one. I have just emphasized various aspects of it before the General Assembly of the United Nations, and I shall touch upon others during my apostolic journey across your country. Today, let me just dwell on the spirit and nature of the Church's contribution to the cause of Justice and Peace, and let me also mention certain urgent priorities which your service to humanity ought to concentrate upon today.

Social thinking and social practice inspired by the Gospel must always be marked by a special sensitivity towards those who are most in distress, those who are extremely poor, those suffering from all the physical, mental and moral ills that afflict humanity, including hunger, neglect, unemployment and despair. There are many poor people of this sort around the world. There are many in your own midst. On many occasions, your nation has gained a well-deserved reputation for generosity, both public and private. Be faithful to that tradition, in keeping with your vast possibilities and present responsibilities. The network of charitable works of each kind that the Church has succeeded in creating here is a valuable means for effectively mobilizing generous undertakings aimed at relieving the situations of distress that continually arise both at home and elsewhere in the world. Make an effort to ensure that this form of aid keeps its irreplaceable character as a fraternal and personal encounter with those who are in distress; is if necessary, re-establish this very character against all the elements that work in the opposite direction. Let this sort of aid be respectful of the freedom and dignity of those being helped, and let it be a means of

forming the conscience of the givers.

4. But this is not enough. Within the framework of your national institutions and in cooperation with all your compatriots, you will also want to seek out the structural reasons which foster or cause the different forms of poverty in the world and in your own country, so that of you can apply the proper remedies. You will not allow yourselves to be intimidated or discouraged by oversimplified explanations, which are more ideological than scientific—explanations which try to account for a complex evil by some single cause. But neither will you recoil before the reforms—even profound ones—of attitudes and structures that may prove necessary in order to re-create over and over again the conditions needed by the disadvantaged if they are to have a fresh chance in the hard struggle of life. The poor of the United States and of the world are your brothers and sisters in Christ. You must never be content to leave them just the crumbs from the feast. You must take of your substance, and not just of your abundance, in is order to help them. And you must treat them like guests at your family table.

5. Catholics of the United States, while developing your own legitimate institutions, you also participate in the nation's affairs within the framework of institutions and organizations springing from the nation's common history and from your common concern. This you do hand in hand with your fellow citizens of every creed and confession. Unity among you in all such endeavors is essential, under the leadership of your Bishops, for deepening, proclaiming and effectively promoting the truth about man, his dignity and his inalienable rights, the truth such as the Church receives it in Revelation and such as she ceaselessly develops it in her social teaching in the light of the Gospel. These shared convictions, however, are not a ready-made model for society (cf. *Octogesima Adveniens*, 42). It is principally the task of lay people to put them into practice in concrete projects, to define priorities and to develop models that are suitable for promoting man's real good. The Second Vatican Council's Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* tells us that "lay people should seek from priests light and spiritual strength. Let the lay people not imagine that their pastors are always such experts that to every problem which arises, however complicated, they can readily give a concrete solution, or even that such is their mission. Rather, enlightened by Christian wisdom and giving close attention to the teaching authority of the Church, let the lay people assume their own distinctive role" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 43).

6. In order to bring this undertaking to a successful conclusion, fresh spiritual and moral energy drawn from the inexhaustible divine source is needed. This energy does not develop easily. The life style of many of the members of our rich and permissive societies is easy, and so is the life style of increasing groups inside the poorer countries. As I said last year to the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Commission Justice and Peace, "Christians will want to be in the vanguard in favoring ways of life that decisively break with a frenzy of consumerism, exhausting and joyless" (*November 11, 1978*). It is not a question of slowing down progress, for there is no human progress when everything conspires to give free rein to the instincts of self-interest, sex and power. We must find a simple way of living. For it is not right that the standard of living of the rich

countries should seek to maintain itself by draining off a great part of the reserves of energy and raw materials that are meant to serve the whole of humanity. For readiness to create a greater and more equitable solidarity between peoples is the first condition for peace. Catholics of the United States, and all you citizens of the United States, you have such a tradition of spiritual generosity, industry, simplicity and sacrifice that you cannot fail to heed this call today for a new enthusiasm and a fresh determination. It is in the joyful simplicity of a life inspired by the Gospel and the Gospel's spirit of fraternal sharing that you will find the best remedy for sour criticism, paralyzing doubt and the temptation to make money the principal means and indeed the very measure of human advancement.

7. On various occasions, I have referred to the Gospel parable of the rich man and Lazarus. "Once there was a rich man who dressed in purple and linen and feasted splendidly every day. At his gate lay a beggar named Lazarus who was covered with sores. Lazarus longed to eat the scraps that fell from the rich man's table" (*Lk 16 :19 ff.*). Both the rich man and the beggar died and judgment was rendered on their conduct. And the Scripture tells us that Lazarus found consolation, but that the rich man found torment. Was the rich man condemned because he had riches, because he abounded in earthly possessions, because he "dressed in purple and linen and feasted splendidly every day?" No, I would say that it was not for this reason. The rich man was condemned because he did not pay attention to the other man. Because he failed to take notice of Lazarus, the person who sat at his door and who longed to eat the scraps from his table. Nowhere does Christ condemn the mere possession of earthly goods as such. Instead, he pronounces very harsh words against those who use their possessions in a selfish way, without paying attention to the needs of others. The Sermon on the Mount begins with the words : "Blessed are the poor in spirit". And at the end of the account of the Last Judgment as found in Saint Matthew's Gospel, Jesus speaks the words that we all know so well: "I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink. I was away from home and you gave me no welcome, naked and you gave me no clothing. I was ill and in prison and you did not come and comfort me" (*Mt 25 :42-43*).

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus must always be present in our memory; it must form our conscience. Christ demands openness to our brothers and sisters in need—openness from the rich, the affluent, the economically advanced; openness to the poor, the underdeveloped and the disadvantaged. Christ demands an openness that is more than benign attention, more than token actions or half-hearted efforts that leave the poor as destitute as before or even more so.

All of humanity must think of the parable of the rich man and the beggar. Humanity must translate it into contemporary terms, in terms of economy and politics, in terms of all human rights, in terms of relations between the "First", "Second" and "Third World". We cannot stand idly by when thousands of human beings are dying of hunger. Nor can we remain indifferent when the rights of the human spirit are trampled upon, when violence is done to the human conscience in matters of truth, religion, and cultural creativity.

We cannot stand idly by, enjoying our own riches and freedom, if, in any place, the Lazarus of the twentieth century stands at our doors. In the light of the parable of Christ, riches and freedom mean a special responsibility. Riches and freedom create a special obligation. And so, in the name of the solidarity that binds us all together in a common humanity, I again proclaim the dignity of every human person: the rich man and Lazarus are both human beings, both of them equally created in the image and likeness of God, both of them equally redeemed by Christ, at a great price, the price of "the precious blood of Christ" (*1 Pt 1 :19*).

8. Brothers and sisters in Christ, with deep conviction and affection I repeat to you the words that I addressed to the world when I took up my apostolic ministry in the service of all men and women: "Do not be afraid. Open wide the doors for Christ. To his saving power open the boundaries of states, economic and political systems, the vast fields of culture, civilization and development. Do not be afraid. Christ knows what is in man. He alone knows it" ([October 22, 1978](#)) .

As I said to you at the beginning, Christ is our Justice and our Peace, and all our works of justice and peace draw from this source the irreplaceable energy and light for the great task before us. As we resolutely commit ourselves to the service of all the needs of individuals and of peoples—for Christ urges us to do so—we shall nevertheless remind ourselves that the Church's mission is not limited to this witness to social fruitfulness of the Gospel. Along this road that leads the Church to man, she does not offer, in the matter of justice and peace, only the earthly fruits of the Gospel ; she brings to man—to every human person—their very source; Jesus Christ himself, our Justice and our Peace.

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