



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

HOLY MASS AT THE GRANT PARK

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

*Grant Park, Chicago
Friday, 5 October 1979*

My brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ,

1. The readings of today's celebration place us immediately before the deep mystery of our calling as Christians.

Before Jesus was taken up to heaven, he gathered his disciples around him, and he explained to them once more the meaning of his mission of salvation : "Thus it is written", he said, "that the Messiah must suffer and rise from the dead on the third day. In his name, penance for the remission of sins is to be preached to all nations" (*Lk 24 :46-47*). At the moment that he took leave of his Apostles he commanded them, and through them the whole Church, each one of us: to go out and bring the message of redemption to all nations. Saint Paul expresses this forcefully in his second letter to the Corinthians: "He has entrusted the message of reconciliation to us. This makes us ambassadors of Christ, God as it were appealing through us" (*2 Cor 5: 19-20*).

Once again, the Lord places us fully in the mystery of humanity, a humanity that is in need of salvation. And God has willed that the salvation of humanity should take place through the humanity of Christ, who for our sake died and was raised up (cf. *2 Cor 5 :15*), and who also entrusted his redeeming mission to us. Yes, we are truly "ambassadors for Christ", and workers for evangelization.

In the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangeliij Nuntiandi*, which he wrote at the request of the Third

General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, my predecessor in the See of Saint Peter, Paul VI, invited the whole People of God to meditate on their basic duty of evangelization. He invited each one of us to examine in what way we might be true witnesses to the message of redemption, in what way we might communicate to others the Good News that we have received from Jesus through his Church.

2. There are certain conditions that are necessary if we are to share in the evangelizing mission of the Church. This afternoon, I wish to stress one of these conditions in particular. I am speaking about the unity of the Church, our unity in Jesus Christ. Let me repeat what Paul VI said about this unity : "The Lord's spiritual testament tells us that unity among his followers is not only the proof that we are his, but also the proof that he is sent by the Father. It is the test of credibility of Christians and of Christ himself ... Yes, the destiny of evangelization is certainly bound up with the witness of unity given by the Church" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 77).

I am prompted to choose this particular aspect of evangelization by looking at the thousands of people whom I see gathered around me today. When I lift up my eyes, I see in you the People of God, united to sing the praises of the Lord and to celebrate his Eucharist. I see also the whole people of America, one nation formed of many people : *E pluribus unum*.

3. In the first two centuries of your history as a nation, you have travelled a long road, always in search of a better future, in search of stable employment, in search of a homestead. You have travelled "From sea to shining sea" to find your identity, to discover each other along the way, and to find your own place in this immense country.

Your ancestors came from many different countries across the oceans to meet here with the people of different communities that were already established here. In every generation, the process has been repeated: new groups arrive, each one with a different history, to settle here and become part of something new. The same process still goes on when families move from the south to the north, from the east to the west. Each time they come with their own past to a new town or a new city, to become part of a new community. The pattern repeats itself over and over: *E pluribus unum*—the many form a new unity.

4. Yes, something new was created every time. You brought with you a different culture and you contributed your own distinctive richness to the whole; you had different skills and you put them to work, complementing each other, to create industry, agriculture and business; each group carried with it different human values and shared them with the others for the enrichment of your nation. *E pluribus unum*: you became a new entity, a new people, the true nature of which cannot be adequately explained as a mere putting together of various communities.

And so, looking at you, I see people who have thrown their destinies together and now write a common history. Different as you are, you have come to accept each other, at times imperfectly

and even to the point of subjecting each other to various forms of discrimination: at times only after a long period of misunderstanding and rejection; even now still growing in understanding and appreciation of each other's differences. In expressing gratitude for the many blessings you have received, you also become aware of the duty you have towards the less favored in your own midst and in the rest of the world—a duty of sharing, of loving, of serving. As a people, you recognize God as the source of your many blessings, and you are open to his love and his law.

This is America in her ideal and her resolution : "one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all". This is the way America was conceived; this is what she was called to be. And for all this, we offer thanks to the Lord.

5. But there is another reality that I see when I look at you. It is even deeper, and more demanding than the common history and union which you built from the richness of your different cultural and ethnic heritages—those heritages that you now rightly want to know and to preserve. History does not exhaust itself in material progress, in technological conquest, or in cultural achievement only. Coming together around the altar of sacrifice to break the Bread of the Holy Eucharist with the Successor of Peter, you testify to this even deeper reality: to your unity as members of the People of God.

"We, though many, are one body in Christ" (*Rom 12 :5*). The Church too is composed of many members and enriched by the diversity of those who make up the one community of faith and baptism, the one Body of Christ. What brings us together and makes us one is our faith—the one apostolic faith. We are all one, because we have accepted Jesus Christ as the Son of God, the Redeemer of the human race, the sole Mediator between God and man. By the sacrament of Baptism we have been truly incorporated into the crucified and glorified Christ, and through the action of the Holy Spirit we have become living members of his one body. Christ gave us the wonderful sacrament of the Eucharist, by which the unity of the Church is both expressed and continually brought about and perfected.

6. "One Lord, one faith, one baptism" (*Eph 4 :5*), thus we are all bound together, as the People of God, the Body of Christ, in a unity that transcends the diversity of our origin, culture, education and personality—in a unity that does not exclude a rich diversity in ministries and services. With Saint Paul we proclaim: "Just as each of us has one body with many members, and not all the members have the same function, so too we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another" (*Rom 12 :4-5*).

If then the Church, the one body of Christ, is to be a forcefully discernible sign of the Gospel message, all her members must show forth, in the words of Paul VI, that "harmony and consistency of doctrine, life and worship which marked the first days of her existence" (*Apostolic Exhortation on Reconciliation within the Church*, 2), when Christians "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (*Acts 2 :42*).

Our unity in faith must be complete, lest we fail to give witness to the Gospel, lest we cease to be evangelizing. No local ecclesial community therefore can cut itself off from the treasure of the faith as proclaimed by the Church's teaching office, for it is to this teaching office of the Church, to this Magisterium that the deposit of faith has been especially entrusted by Christ. With Paul VI I attest to the great truth : "While being translated into all expressions, the content of the faith must be neither impaired nor mutilated. While being clothed with the outward forms proper to each people... it must remain the content of the Catholic faith just exactly as the ecclesial Magisterium has received it and transmits it" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 65).

7. Finally, and above all, the mission of evangelization that is mine and yours, must be carried out through a constant unselfish witnessing to the unity of love. Love is the force that opens hearts to the word of Jesus and to his Redemption: love is the only basis for human relationships that respect in one another the dignity of the children of God created in his image and saved by the death and Resurrection of Jesus; love is the only driving force that impels us to share with our brothers and sisters all that we are and have.

Love is the power that gives rise to dialogue, in which we listen to each other and learn from each other. Love gives rise, above all, to the dialogue of prayer in which we listen to God's word, which is alive in the Holy Bible and alive in the life of the Church. Let love then build the bridge across our differences and at times our contrasting positions. Let love for each other and love for truth be the answer to polarization, when factions are formed because of differing views in matters that relate to faith or to the priorities for action. No one in the ecclesial community should ever feel alienated or unloved, even when tensions arise in the course of the common efforts to bring the fruits of the Gospel to society around us. Our unity as Christians, as Catholics, must always be a unity of love in Jesus Christ our Lord.

In a few moments, we shall celebrate our unity by renewing the Sacrifice of Christ. Each one will bring a different gift to be presented in union with the offering of Jesus: dedication to the betterment of society; efforts to console those who suffer ; the desire to give witness for justice; the resolve to work for peace and brotherhood; the joy of a united family ; or suffering in body or mind. Different gifts, yes, but all united in the one great gift of Christ's love for his Father and for us—everything united in the unity of Christ and his Sacrifice.

And in the strength and power, in the joy and peace of this sacred unity, we pledge ourselves anew—as one people—to fulfill the command of our Lord Jesus Christ: Go and teach all people my Gospel. By word and example give witness to my name. And, behold, I am with you always, until the end of the world.

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