



# The Holy See

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## APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO CANADA

(SEPTEMBER 9-20, 1984) **ECUMENICAL MEETING OF PRAYER** *HOMILY OF POPE JOHN PAUL II* *Cathedral of Saint Joseph (Edmonton)*

*Sunday, 16 September 1984* Dear Brothers and Sisters, my fellow Christians, and all of you who have come here this evening in order to pray, to pay honour to the mystery of God.<sup>1</sup> On this Sunday evening in Edmonton, the evening of the first day of the week when we Christians celebrate the Resurrection of the Lord, we come together in prayer in this beautiful Cathedral of Saint Joseph. We are gathered in the joy of our common Baptism, in the power of the word of God, and in the peace and love of Christ, whom we proclaim as the Light of the world and the supreme manifestation of God. I invite you all to reflect with me this evening on the mystery of the presence of God. As men and women of faith, we believe that God is present in his creation, that he is the Lord of history who directs the times and the seasons, that he is near to all who call upon him: the poor and the dejected, the sorrowing and the lonely, the weak and the oppressed. We believe that God breaks through the silence, and even the noise, of our daily lives, revealing to us his truth and his love. He wishes to dispel our fear and strengthen our hope in his saving mercy. God personally speaks to the heart of every individual, but he also acts through the community of people whom he predestines to be his own. We see this first in the history of the Jewish people. Through Abraham, our father in faith, through Isaac and Jacob, and in particular through Moses, God called a people to belong to him in a special way. He entered into a covenant with them, saying: "I will be their God and they shall be my people" (*Jer.* 31, 33). When his chosen ones sinned and went their own way, forgetting the God who saved them, God in his never-ending love intervened in their lives by means of the Prophets. He called the people to repentance and promised to establish with them a new and better covenant. This New Covenant he described in this way: "Deep within them I will plant my Law, writing it on their hearts... They will all know me, the least no less than the greatest, since I will forgive their iniquity and never call their sin to mind" (*Ibid.* 31, 33-34). And how did God establish this New Covenant? How did he write his law on the hearts of his chosen ones? With the Blood of Jesus, the Blood of the Lamb of God, the Blood of the New and Everlasting Covenant, our Saviour's Blood, which is the price of our Redemption and the most eloquent expression possible of the love of God for the world.<sup>2</sup> The presence of God is embodied in its fullness in Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God who became the Son of Mary and who shed his Blood for us on the Cross. Jesus is Emmanuel, God with us, the Word made flesh, the revelation of the eternal Father. Before this great mystery of the presence of God, we stand in awe and reverence, and our hearts and voices long to break forth in songs and hymns of praise. And indeed this is most appropriate, for the first duty of a creature is to glorify the Creator, the first duty of a redeemed people is to praise their Lord and Saviour. That is why I am so pleased to join you tonight in this Evening Service of Praise. How good it is, as brothers and sisters in Christ, to join our voices in "psalms and hymns and inspired songs"! (*Col.* 3, 16) Psalm 103, which we are praying together this evening, shows us a person whose whole being is filled with the praise of God: "My soul, give thanks to the Lord, / all my being, bless his holy name. / My soul, give thanks

to the Lord / and never forget all his blessings" (*Ps.* 103, 1-2). "Never forget all his blessings": a heart filled with praise never forgets the many blessings of God. For the prayer of praise involves an act of remembering with gratitude, remembering all the ways that God has shown his saving love. And so the Psalmist declares: "It is he who forgives all your guilt, / who heals every one of your ills, / who redeems your life from the grave, / who crowns you with love and compassion, / who fills your life with good things, / renewing your youth like an eagle's" (*Ibid.* 3-5). The prayer of praise proceeds from a humble awareness of our unworthiness and our total dependence on God, combined with a childlike trust in God's abundant mercy. And so the Psalmist continues: "As a father has compassion on his sons, / the Lord has pity on those who fear him. / For he knows of what we are made, / he remembers that we are dust" (*Ibid.* 13-14). To praise the Lord is also to acclaim the many attributes of God, to extol the qualities of this great and holy God who has established a covenant with his people. Thus the Psalmist says: "The Lord is compassion and love, / slow to anger and rich in mercy... / His justice reaches out to children's children / when they keep his covenant in truth" (*Ibid.* 8. 17-18).

**3.** Living in the presence of God, Christians break forth in acclamation and praise, expressing gratitude for the gift of faith and for all the saving deeds of the Lord. But we must also turn to God with prayers of petition, seeking from the Lord shelter and safety from the forces of evil, forgiveness of our sins and healing of our wounded lives, strength to bear life's burdens and grace to fulfil God's will. Often the prayer of petition must be made with a sense of urgency and pleading. And so, the man in Psalm 141 cries out: "I have called to you, Lord; hasten to help me! / Hear my voice when I cry to you... / To you, Lord God, my eyes are turned: / in you I take refuge, spare my soul!" (*Ps.* 141, 1.8). The prayer of petition springs from a humble awareness of one's great need for God's grace, and from a deep trust in the powerful mercy of God. Thus, it is accompanied by an attitude of adoration. We kneel, at least in spirit, in the awesome presence of Almighty God, and the words that we utter are like those of the Psalmist who pleads: "Let my prayer arise before you like incense / the raising of my hands like an evening oblation" (*Ibid.* 2).

**4.** Our Saviour promised us: "Where two or three meet in my name, I shall be there with them" (*Matth.* 18, 20). We know that this is true this evening as we Christians join together in common prayer. The presence of Christ fills this cathedral as we praise his name, and as we pray for that perfect unity among Christians which he wills for his followers. La prière authentique se prolonge en service généreux, c'est pourquoi nous n'oublions pas ce soir les besoins immenses de nos frères et sœurs qui souffrent à travers le monde. Fidèles à répondre au Seigneur, dont l'Esprit Saint a inspiré le mouvement œcuménique, non seulement nous prions ensemble et nous ouvrons un dialogue théologique entre nous, mais nous collaborons par un effort mené en commun pour promouvoir un monde où règnent davantage la justice et la paix. En nous aidant les uns les autres, nous cherchons à devenir "le sel de la terre" et "la lumière du monde" (*Matth.* 5, 11-16). De cette manière, nous proclamons ensemble la Bonne Nouvelle de la présence de Dieu dans le monde en la personne de Jésus-Christ, qui est un avec son Eglise.

**5.** L'admirable prière que nous appelons le "Magnificat" et que nous disons ensemble ce soir, oriente nos esprits vers Dieu et vers sa présence salvifique dans l'histoire humaine. Elle attire aussi notre attention sur Marie, Mère de notre Sauveur. Cette femme, avec sa foi, reste aujourd'hui pour nous un modèle de sainteté de vie. D'une manière particulière, elle a fait l'expérience de la présence de Dieu dans sa vie quand elle est devenue la Mère de notre Rédempteur. Femme au cœur rempli de la louange de Dieu, elle célébra la grandeur de Dieu, en exaltant sa bonté pour les pauvres et les humbles, en proclamant sa miséricorde envers toutes les générations. Avec Marie, nous unissons nos voix pour louer "la grandeur du Seigneur" (*Luc.* 1, 46). We do this above all in union with Jesus Christ, who remains for ever the Light of the world, and who offers us the light of life (*Jo.* 8, 12). Dearly beloved friends: let us receive this light from him and walk in this light, for the glory of his Father, who lives and reigns with the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. Amen. © Copyright 1984 - Libreria

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