



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC PILGRIMAGE TO BANGLADESH, SINGAPORE, FIJI ISLANDS,
NEW ZEALAND, AUSTRALIA AND SEYCHELLES

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Singapore, 20 November 1986

"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice".

*Dear Archbishop Yong,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

1. I do indeed rejoice in the Lord as I celebrate the Eucharist today in Singapore. And in the love of Christ I greet you my beloved brothers and sisters of the Catholic Church. It is truly a joy to be with you. And it is right for us to rejoice together in the Sacred Liturgy, following the exhortation of Saint Paul in the second reading: "Rejoice with those who rejoice". We who have been baptized into Christ have the privilege and the duty to give praise and glory to the Most Holy Trinity. This is the primary reason why we gather for the Eucharist. We offer joyful thanks to the Father.

We rejoice in the gift of faith through which we have come to know and love Jesus Christ our Lord.

At this time I also offer warm greetings to our brothers and sisters of other Christian Communion, with whom we share a common Baptism and love for Christ. I am grateful for your presence. And I greet most cordially the members of other religions and all the people of good will in this Republic.

Jesus Christ came into the world to bring love and peace. And it is my desire to stand in your midst as a servant of the love and peace of Christ.

2. I also come among you as the Successor of Peter and Chief Pastor of the universal Church. And thus I wish to encourage and confirm you in your faith and to deepen your appreciation of the

bonds of faith and charity which link you with your brothers and sisters in Christ throughout the world.

The Church in Singapore that I am visiting today, like your young and vigorous nation, is flourishing and fully alive. You are more than a hundred priests, three hundred men and women religious, numerous active and deeply committed lay men and women - over a hundred thousand baptized members. You have both a major and a minor seminary, a large number of educational institutions and social welfare organizations, in addition to your many parishes.

Even more important than the many institutions is the spirit of ecclesial communion that you enjoy among yourselves and with the neighbouring local Churches. You also appreciate the need for ecumenical sensitivity and cooperation, and you seek to maintain friendly, constructive relations with your non-Christian brothers and sisters.

This is the Church in Singapore which I rejoice to be with today. And it is this Church that I wish to urge on to even greater spiritual growth.

3. Allow me, for a moment, to reflect with you on the history of the Church in your country. Let us briefly trace the stages of evangelization, for remembering God's blessings in the past in a source of inspiration and hope in the present, a cause for rejoicing and praise.

Two years after Sir Stamford Raffles founded Singapore in 1819, a Catholic priest took up residence here and the Church took root. From that time forward she has been increasing in your land. These simple and human beginnings have grown steadily under the providential hand of God.

These however were not the first efforts at evangelization in this region. At the beginning of the sixteenth century the Catholic faith had been brought to the Malay Peninsula during the time of the Portuguese colonization. In the middle of that century the region experienced a vigorous and fruitful missionary effort. Among those who preached the Gospel here was Saint Francis Xavier, who visited Malacca a number of times. Churches came to be built, schools established, and hospitals constructed. Later, however, evangelization came to a halt and the Church underwent a decline.

As we have noted, the Catholic missionary effort in Singapore began again at the early part of the nineteenth century. But it is in more recent decades that it has experienced a remarkable growth. In 1888 the Diocese of Malacca was created, and it included Singapore within its boundaries. In 1955 the Archdiocese of Malacca Singapore was established and in 1972 Singapore was set up as a separate Archdiocese. This is the Church which I rejoice to be with today. And it is to all of you, my brothers and sisters in Christ, that I wish to proclaim his message of love and peace.

4. In today's Gospel, Jesus offers us this message of love and peace: "If anyone loves me he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we shall come to him and make our home with him". He goes on to say: "My own peace I give you, a peace the world cannot give, this is my gift to you".

With these words, Jesus indicates once more that love constitutes the very heart of his mission from the Father: he, the Son, comes bringing love.

Love, then, is the most profound truth about God himself, "because God is love".

The love of God is personified in the Holy Spirit: I said in my Encyclical on the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church and the world: "In the Holy Spirit the intimate life of the Triune God becomes totally gift, an exchange of mutual love between the divine Persons . . . It is the Holy Spirit who is the personal expression of this self-giving, of this being-love. He is Person-Love".

5. Love constitutes the very essence of the teaching of Christ, for it is the greatest commandment. Life - the lives of all of us - must be based on love. Saint Paul demonstrates this to us in a practical way in the instructions contained in today's second reading taken from the Letter to the Romans: "Do not let your love be a pretence", he says, "but sincerely prefer good to evil. Love each other as much as brothers should, and have a profound respect for each other". Genuine human love is a faithful reflection of God's love. Therefore love is characterized by a deep respect for all people, regardless of their race, belief or whatever makes them different from ourselves. Love responds generously to the needs of the poor, and it is marked by compassion for those in sorrow. Love is quick to offer hospitality and is persevering in times of trial. It is always ready to forgive, to hope and to return a blessing for a curse. " Love does not come to an end".

The commandment of love is the very centre of the Gospel.

6. It is Christ, the only Son of the Father, who teaches us the truth about God who is love. And this teaching of the Son is renewed constantly in the Church and in human hearts by the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, the one who, as Jesus promised, "will teach you everything and remind you of all I have said to you".

This promise of Jesus means not only that in every land and every age the Spirit "will continue to inspire the spreading of the Gospel of salvation but also that he will help people to understand the correct meaning of the content of Christ's message. The Holy Spirit, then, will ensure that in the Church there will always continue the same truth which the Apostles heard from their Master".

It is because of the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, that the Church's teaching is one and the same throughout the world. It is the same in Singapore as in Rome, for the same Holy Spirit is at work in our minds and hearts.

7. Immediately after speaking of the Holy Spirit, Jesus says to his disciples: "Peace I bequeath to you, my own peace I give you, a peace the world cannot give, this is my gift to you".

Peace is the fruit of love.

Peace is the fruit of the action of the Holy Spirit.

This peace is given - as a gift - in the Paschal Mystery of Christ.

At the same time it is assigned as a task, and it is continually assigned, so that as the Psalm says "justice and peace will embrace" It is assigned to people with differing roles and responsibilities, in the family, the community, society and international life.

8. Peacemaking is a task that is never finished, but always in progress, always in need of being confirmed and strengthened. We must constantly work for peace.

True peace begins in the mind and heart, in the will and soul of the human person, for it proceeds from genuine love of others. Indeed it is true to say that peace is the product of love, when people consciously decide to improve their relationship with others, to make every effort to overcome divisions and misunderstandings, and if possible even to become friends.

As Christian, we know that we can love other only because God has first loved us. We find inspiration and strength in the words of today's first reading from the Prophet Jeremiah, where God says to us: "I have loved you with an everlasting love, so I am constant in my affection for you". The everlasting love of God spurs us on in our efforts at peacemaking.

Peace requires justice, an attitude which recognizes the dignity and a firm commitment to strive to secure and protect the basic human rights of all. Where there is no justice there can be no peace. Peace is possible only where there is a just order that ensures the rights of everyone. World peace is possible only where the international order is just.

9. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, I make this appeal to you: build your lives on love. "Do not let your love be a pretence, but sincerely prefer good to evil . . . Do all you can to live at peace with everyone ".

"Blessed are the peacemakers". These words of our Saviour offer us a promise and a challenge. In faithful response to them, let us build peace!

After Mass I shall speak to the priests, but now I would like to say a few words to the religious. Dear brothers and sisters, you whom Christ has called to follow him more closely in chastity, poverty and obedience: your vocation finds its meaning and purpose in love - your love for Jesus and his love for you. The fruit of love is interior peace, "a peace the world cannot give", the kind of peace which precedes and makes possible peace among individuals and in the world. Is it any

wonder, then, that one of the greatest heroes of peace in the history of the world is a religious founder, Saint Francis of Assisi? May you too be known as consecrated persons alive with love for Christ and radiating inner peace. By faithfully living out your vocation you are able to bring love and peace to the world. Remember too that the Sacrament of Penance in a special way restores peace to human hearts, for it is the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the liturgical celebration of God's mercy and love.

I want to remind you families too how much you can contribute to peace. Husbands and wives, together with your children, you are the vital cell of society and the first foundation for its stability and well-being.

I wish to assure couples that the Church supports them as they strive to exercise responsibly their fundamental right to form families, to bear and rear their children without any type of coercion or pressure. It is the right of the married couple to make a free, informed and mutual decision, in accordance with objective moral principles, regarding the spacing of births and the size of the family. This decision should be based on their recognition of their responsibilities to God, to themselves, to their children, to their family and to society. In pursuing these decisions couples should be able to rely on those morally licit methods of family planning that are in accordance with the dignity of the person and with the authentic expression of conjugal love.

Families have a unique place in the Church as a community of life and love. While being a communion of persons in dialogue with God, they have an important role in society. They must remain open to the larger community, so that the loving concern they show in their homes may be extended to others for the betterment of all.

May I say at this time how pleased I am to learn of the moral education programme which has been established in the schools in Singapore. Such an initiative, which aims at inculcating human values and personal discipline, can truly complement the efforts of parents as the primary educators of their children in the love of God.

And now a word to you, dear young people, who make up such a large and dynamic part of the Church in Singapore, in Malaysia and throughout Asia. To you too I make an appeal: be peacemakers. Do not underestimate the great need for your contribution in promoting peace. As I said in my 1985 World Day of Peace Message: Peace and Youth go forward together. "When I look at you, the young people, I feel great gratitude and hope. The future far into the next century lies in your hands. The future of peace lies in your hearts . . . Trust in the grandeur of the human vocation - a vocation to be pursued with respect for truth and for the dignity and inviolable rights of the human person . . . Do not be afraid!"

The task of peacemaking belongs to every one of us. None can escape this duty, especially in an age marked by nuclear threat and increasing violence. I would like however to single out one more

group of people who make a unique contribution to the cause of peace. I am referring to the sick and the aged, and all those who share in the sufferings of Christ. In my Apostolic Letter on the Christian Meaning of Human Suffering I stated: "The mystery of the Redemption of the world is in an amazing way rooted in suffering . . . We ask all you who suffer to support us. We ask precisely you who are weak to become a source of strength for the Church and humanity. In the terrible battle between the forces of good and evil, revealed to our eyes by our modern world, may your suffering in union with the Cross of Christ be victorious!".

10. I want you to now how much I have looked forward to this opportunity of celebrating the Eucharist with you, and I am grateful to God that I am able to be here in Singapore. I would have liked to stay with you longer. But I find consolation in the words of Jesus in today's Gospel. He tells us: "The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all I have said to you".

The Father sends his Spirit of truth and love into the world and the Spirit guides us in the ways of peace. Therefore, "Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid". Dear brothers and sisters: the Holy Spirit is with you.

I wish at this time to entrust the whole Church in Singapore to Mary. It was she who through the power of the Holy Spirit first gave Christ to the world. By her love and her prayers may she now give him also to you. Amen.

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