



The Holy See

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

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Darwin (Australia), 29 November 1986

"The nations will learn that I am the Lord".'

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. These words of the Lord spoken through the Prophet Ezekiel have been fulfilled in every corner of the earth: "The nations will know that I am the Lord". In every place people worship God and can him "Father", as Jesus Christ taught us. After Christ's Death and Resurrection, the word went out from Jerusalem, carried by the Apostles and the first Christian communities until, in the course of time, the Good News of salvation in Christ reached the very ends of the earth.

Dear people of Darwin: here too in the Northern territory God's word has been proclaimed and we are now gathered to proclaim it and to celebrate it sacramentally in the Eucharist, which is the Sacrifice of Christ's Body and Blood.

I thank God who has given me the opportunity to make this visit. Today I am learning how truly vast your country is: from Melbourne to Darwin, and from here to Alice Springs and Adelaide - all in the same day. The Pope has finally arrived and wishes to greet each one of you in the love of Christ.

I greet Bishop Collins of this diocese, and the other bishops present, as well as the priests, religious and lay people gathered here; the young and the old, the children and, in a special way, the sick; all of you from Darwin, Bathurst Island, Melville Island, Port Keats and Daly River; from Katherine, from all the townships and communities out of Darwin.

I thank the members of the other Christian Communions who have chosen to share this moment with the Catholic community. I am comforted by the knowledge that the spirit of Christian fellowship is strong among you.

I also extend a respectful greeting to the representatives of the State and local Governments.

2. As the Successor of Peter, I have come to you in the faith that Peter confessed at Caesarea Philippi, when he said to Jesus: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God". Yes, the message that I bring is none other than the one which has always been proclaimed by the Church: our salvation is in Christ Jesus, "the Way, the Truth, and the Life".

It is nearly two hundred years since the Gospel was first proclaimed in this continent. Because of the political circumstances of the time, the Catholic laity were entirely without the service of a priest for fifteen years after the establishment of the first colony in Sydney. For a further period of approximately the same length they had only intermittent service from priests allowed to serve them temporarily. At present, the whole Church throughout the world is preparing for the next session of the Synod of Bishops, and is engaged in a reflection on the mission of the laity. It is therefore particularly fitting that we should remember those first lay Catholics in the beginnings of the Church here in Australia. We are reminded that responsibility for the Church and her evangelizing mission is not a matter only for bishops, priests and religious. It belongs to the entire community.

When the first priests, brothers and sisters came to this continent they hardly knew what risks they faced. In most cases they had no hope of ever returning to their native lands and their own people. When we ask why they chose a life of such uncertainty and frequent hardship we can only answer that they were moved by an intense love of Jesus Christ and their fellow human beings. They came in response to the explicit command of Jesus to his followers: "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation". They were filled with a great missionary zeal.

3. Here in Darwin, I am pleased to pay special tribute to the missionary congregations of religious which over the years have provided personnel to serve the particular Churches of more isolated parts of this continent: the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, the Society of the Catholic Apostolate, the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, and so many others. In turn, the Church in Australia has given evidence of a lively missionary spirit. Her sons and daughters have gone outside their own land to spread the Gospel in Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, the Pacific Islands, and elsewhere. In this city, which is closer to great cities and civilizations in South East Asia than to Sydney or Melbourne, I invite the entire Church in Australia to remember the missionary challenge, the first demand of which is prayer: "Pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest".

There is a special need in the Church for those who are willing to go abroad to other communities

and nations in the name of Jesus Christ. These priests, religious and lay people place their talents, their energies and above all their faith at the service of a people not their own. They follow in the glorious tradition of the great Saint Paul, Saint Augustine of Canterbury, Saint Patrick and Saint Francis Xavier. The missionaries of today deserve the support of our prayers, our interest and our material help. There is still so much to be done! Two thousand years after the coming of Christ, over two thirds of the human family have still not heard the Gospel message.

I express my heartfelt gratitude for the work being done in Australia by the Pontifical Mission Aid Societies, and for the generous support given them in all parts of the country. They are the official bodies concerned with promoting the missionary work of the Church everywhere in the world. They are the means by which the Pope seeks to carry out the universal ministry of evangelization which is the special responsibility of the See of Peter.

4. By her very nature the whole Church is missionary. The Second Vatican Council in fact reminds us that "each disciple of Christ has the obligation of spreading the faith". In the cultural climate of our times, and with particular reference to Australia's spiritual needs, the local Churches must work for a renewal of spiritual and missionary endeavour. The modern world is marked by an intense, if often confused, thirst for God. The young especially are crying out for the liberating truth of Christ's message and the programme of life which embodies this message. Today's Gospel gives an eloquent summary of these:

"How happy are the poor in spirit; theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
 Happy the gentle; they shall have the earth for their heritage.
 Happy those who mourn; they shall be comforted.
 Happy those who hunger and thirst for what is right; they shall be satisfied.
 Happy the merciful; they shall have mercy shown them.
 Happy the pure in heart; they shall see God.
 Happy the peacemakers; they shall be called sons of God.
 Happy those who are persecuted for the cause of right; theirs is the kingdom of heaven".

5. The entire Church, which means each of her members, is obliged to make this message known and to bear authentic witness to its truth and beauty. The Beatitudes are the path to life. They reveal man's ultimate destiny and the true meaning of his existence. They build up the community in justice, truth and love. The human and spiritual needs of Australia should make Australian Christians take ever more seriously the challenge of following the Beatitudes and thus becoming ever more "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world".

Today in Australia, as in many other countries, there are people who have yet to hear the Gospel message of life and salvation in Jesus Christ for the first time. Others have a very limited and weak understanding of the faith to which they claim to belong. This is particularly evident when we see how little impact the moral values of the Gospel have upon some people in their individual,

family and public life. There is a real need for a second evangelization, and this requires the active and responsible collaboration of all members of the ecclesial community. The laity in particular have to make the Gospel message present in the secular activities of the world.

6. Brothers and sisters: I wish to encourage you and to encourage the entire Church in Australia to respond to the needs of the modern world. People already realize that material progress alone does not bring fulfilment. They desperately need the truth that makes them free. Jesus said: "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free". You have this "truth" in you when Jesus Christ is present in your lives. In this part of the Northern Territory, just as everywhere else, the deeper questions of the human spirit have to be faced and resolved.

I appeal to you to overcome indifference and apathy, to use wisely and responsibly the many natural resources and gifts with which the Creator has richly endowed your land. Serve the Lord with gladness!

May the Christian community of the Northern Territory be united in faith and love. May each of you be a missionary of Christ's peace and reconciliation to others.

To the children and the young I say this: you too are missionaries to one another. Be strong in faith, and always be willing to share that faith with others, through your prayers, your words and the example of your lives.

And may Mary, Help of Christians and Patroness of Australia, guide all of you - the people of Darwin and the Northern Territory - to her Son, Jesus Christ. It is in his name that all missionary work is done. It is by the power of his Gospel that salvation reaches to the ends of the earth.

Praised be Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world! Amen.

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