



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

CELEBRATION OF VESPERS

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

*Cathedral of the Sacred Heart, Newark
Wednesday, 4 October 1995*

*Dear Archbishop McCarrick, and my other Brother Bishops,
Dear Brother Priests,
Dear Seminarians, Men and Women Religious, and Lay Faithful
of the Family of God which is the Church in Newark!*

1. We are gathered in this Cathedral dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus in order to give thanks to the Most Blessed Trinity for the bonds of faith and love which unite us in the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.

The presence of the President of the United States at this Evening Prayer helps us call to mind that it is precisely our service of God which inspires and motivates the healthy pride which we all feel in our native land. This evening let us thank God for the extraordinary human epic that is the United States of America.

This magnificent building stands in the heart of Newark as a powerful reminder of God's steadfast love for his People and as a sign of faith in Christ, our "hope of glory" (Col. 1: 27). The Cathedral made of stone is the symbol of *the living Church*, "God's household" (1Tim. 3: 15), which is open to everyone without exception, to men and women "of every race and tongue, of every people and nation" (Rev. 5: 9). You – *the People of God in Newark and throughout New Jersey* – are the "living stones" (1Pt. 2: 5) which make up the Body of Christ in the midst of your City and State.

Wherever you are – in your families, neighborhoods, places of work or recreation – you are called *to build up the Church in faith, hope and love.*

2. The Church is alive in you! God, who is the Master Builder of his holy Temple – has poured his love into your hearts through the Holy Spirit! (Cf. Rom. 5: 5) You have received the gift of new life. You have been charged with bringing the Good News "to all creation" (Mk. 16: 5).

The stirring challenge of the *new evangelization* – the aim of which is to proclaim that Jesus Christ is the center of history, the hope of humanity and the joy of every heart (Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 45) – was faced by last year's *Archdiocesan Synod*. I greet with affection all of you who so zealously took part as *Delegates* in that important assembly. The Synod wisely called for a great mobilization of resources so that all Catholics would receive the solid spiritual and doctrinal formation needed in order to bear convincing witness to their faith and assume their full role in the Church's mission. I pray that, as a result of the Synod, the Archdiocese of Newark will become ever more "of one heart and one mind" (Acts. 4: 32) – a community joyously united with its Bishops and priests in attentively listening to the Word of God, devoutly celebrating the Sacraments, and generously meeting the needs of others.

3. With special affection I greet *my brothers in the Priesthood*, and thank each one of you for your dedicated service of the Gospel! The Lord has chosen you to be "*in the forefront*" in bringing souls to him (John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 27). Like Christ, the Head and Shepherd of the Church, you must know, tend and offer your life for your flock (Cf. Jn. 10: 11-16). Ordination configures you to Christ the Servant – to him who humbly washed his Apostles' feet because he came among us "not to be served but to serve" (Cf. Mk. 10: 45). Such selfless service is the model of all ministry in the Church. As you return to your parishes or to the various apostolates in which you are engaged, I pray that – in the words of Saint Paul – God will make you "worthy of his call, and fulfill by his power every honest intention and work of faith" (2Thess. 1: 11).

To the Seminarians – and how heartening it is to know that your number is increasing! – I offer a special word of encouragement. The new evangelization of America calls for a great spiritual maturity on your part. The gift of the Priesthood demands that you follow Christ "even unto death on a Cross" (Cf. Phil. 2: 8). Without the virtues of self-discipline, diligent contemplation of the truth, simplicity of life and joyful dedication to others you will not have the inner strength to combat the culture of death which is threatening the modern world. I urge you to pray each day: "*O good Jesus, make me a priest like unto your own Heart*". Christ himself is your inheritance (Cf. Ps. 16(15): 5-6). He will never abandon you or disappoint you!

4. With profound gratitude for your immense contribution to the Church's life, I embrace all the *men and women Religious*. Whether "your life is hidden with Christ in God" (Cf. Col. 3: 3) in solitude, penance and contemplation, or whether you are actively engaged in the world, the whole ecclesial community looks to you *to see what it means to love the Lord with an undivided heart.*

The recognition of the "genius of woman" and of the specifically feminine charisms which women Religious bring to the Church's life and mission is a providential sign of our times. If in the past these gifts were sometimes insufficiently esteemed or thwarted in their legitimate expression, now is the time for all of us to work together to follow where the Lord leads, in love and fidelity. May the Holy Spirit "strengthen your hearts, making them blameless and holy before our God and Father" (1Thess. 3: 13), so that you may serve his People with ever greater joy!

To the whole Church in Newark and New Jersey I repeat the words of encouragement found in the First Letter of Peter: "There is cause for rejoicing here... because you are achieving faith's goal, your salvation" (1Pt. 1: 6: 9).

5. Dear friends in Christ, the First Letter of Peter exhorts us to be clothed with humility in our dealings with one another; we read: "*Bow humbly under God's mighty hand, so that in due time he may lift you high*" (Ibid. 5: 6). This lowliness and humility is explained as *abandoning ourselves into the hands of God*: "Cast all your cares on him because he cares for you" (Ibid. 5: 7). Yes, *God holds humanity in the highest esteem!* God reveres everything that is authentically human—everything that affects individuals and societies, nations and States!

As you well know, I have come to the United States in connection with the *Fiftieth Anniversary of the founding of the United Nations*. That Organization exists to serve the common good of the human family, and therefore it is fitting that the Pope speak there as a witness to the hope of the Gospel (Cf. Col. 1: 23). The United Nations is an instrument of dialogue and peace. The criteria of its actions ought always to be the integral well-being of people. The challenge which is permanently before its member States, agencies and personnel is similar to the challenge which confronts every individual: "*In your relations with one another clothe yourselves with humility*" (1Pt. 5: 5). *In particular, the powerful and the mighty ought to show meekness* in their dealings with the weak. The powerful always need to remember that they owe their position to God – to the One who "is stern with the arrogant but who shows kindness to the humble" (Cf. *ibid.*). Nations and governments – like individuals – need to acknowledge that the Lord "rules the world with justice; with fairness he rules the peoples and guides the nations" (Ps. 67(66): 5-6).

6. The First Letter of Peter also recalls the need for watchfulness: "*Stay sober and alert*" (1Pt. 5: 8). Fifty years ago, after the end of the incredible destruction caused by the Second World War, the United Nations Organization was established as *an international forum of vigilance* at the service of peace and justice in the world. The United Nations has a necessary role to play *in preventing and relieving* the enormous sufferings which the world's peoples and nations inflict on each other, sufferings which in the Twentieth Century have reached unprecedented proportions in wars and conflicts, and in political and ideological oppression caused by the greed and arrogance of those who plot evil in their hearts.

The history of the world in the last fifty years cannot be written without reference to the United

Nations. Is it not still needed, to watch and warn and exhort when conflict and injustice threaten the tranquillity of order? Should it not be strengthened as the *guarantor of peace, justice and humanitarian concern* – whether in the Balkans, in Africa or in any place where these values are threatened? Should it not be reformed to ensure that it will be guided by an *objective assessment* of the international situation, in order to be a credible forum in which to address issues of fundamental importance for the building of a more human and just world?

7. Our prayer for peace is therefore also a prayer for the United Nations Organization. *Saint Francis of Assisi*, whose feast we celebrate today, shines forth as a great lover and artisan of peace. Let us invoke his intercession upon the United Nations' work for justice and peace throughout the world.

May the God of all grace, who has called us to everlasting glory in Christ, confirm and strengthen all who work and suffer for the peace and well-being of the human family. He alone is the Lord of life and history. To him we pray:

*"O God, be gracious and bless us
and let your face shed its light upon us.
So will your ways be known upon earth
and all nations learn your saving help"* (Ps. 67(66): 2-3).

To him we commend the Church in the United States, and the local Church of Newark and the surrounding Dioceses. *To him be honor, glory and praise! Amen.*