



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION
FOR THE FAITHFUL OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF NEWARK

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Giants' Stadium, Newark

Thursday, 5 October 1995

"Thy Kingdom come!" (Mt. 6: 10).

*Dear Archbishop McCarrick and my other Brother Bishops,
Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,*

1. Each day in the "Our Father" we pray: *"Thy Kingdom come!"* (Cf. *ibid.* 6: 9-13). And in today's Gospel we have heard about Jesus sending out his disciples to proclaim that *"the Kingdom of God is at hand"* (Cf. Lk. 10: 9).

Today we are celebrating the Good News of God's Kingdom here in Giants Stadium, in the *Archdiocese of Newark*, in New Jersey – the Garden State. I greet the whole Catholic community of Newark, in a special way your Pastor and my faithful friend, Archbishop McCarrick, whom I thank for his warm words of welcome. I greet God's beloved people from all of New Jersey – the Bishops, priests, deacons, seminarians, women and men Religious, parents, children, the young, the old, the sick; these greetings include our brothers and sisters of Eastern Rite Dioceses, whose presence gives vibrant witness to the rich diversity of God's Holy Church. I am also grateful to the civic leaders of City and State and the representatives of the various religious denominations who have wished to share this moment of prayer with us.

What is this Kingdom which Jesus announced and which the Church continues to proclaim down the centuries? First, it is the affirmation of God's dominion over all creation. As Creator, he reigns over the world he has made. But the Kingdom means more. It means that *God is present as Lord* in this world. The Kingdom is present above all in *Jesus Christ*, the Eternal Son, who became flesh and dwelt among us (Cf. Jn. 1: 14). Furthermore, the Kingdom embraces us all: by his Death on the Cross and his Resurrection from the dead, Christ redeemed us from our sins and gave us new life in the Spirit. Through the Paschal Mystery – as Saint Paul writes – God "has rescued us from the power of darkness and brought us into the Kingdom of his beloved Son" (Col. 1: 13).

2. Like the people of Israel spoken of in the first reading, who gathered around the priest Ezra and listened to the word of God with profound emotion (Cf. Neh. 8: 5), we have stood to hear the message of *God's presence and love* which the Liturgy presents to us this evening. Nehemiah is speaking of the time after the Babylonian Captivity, when the Jewish people returned to their homeland. At the end of the reading, "Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God, and all the people, their hands raised high, answered: '*Amen, Amen*'" (Neh. 8: 6). This great "Amen" is echoed at every Mass when, at the end of the Eucharistic Prayer, we offer glory and honor to the Father through the Son, in the Holy Spirit. With this "Amen" the whole community acknowledges *the real presence on the Altar of Jesus Christ, the living and eternal Word of the Father*. In the spirit of this great "Amen", all of us gathered here in Giants Stadium praise Jesus Christ for the newness of life (Cf. Rom. 6: 4) which he gives us in the Holy Spirit! *Praised be our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!*

3. The Gospel shows us Jesus sending his disciples to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of God (Cf. Lk. 10: 1). He tells them openly that some people will ignore or reject their message. But such human resistance will not prevent the coming of the Kingdom (Cf. *ibid.* 10: 10-11). The Kingdom is always present because *the Father himself has brought it into the world* through the Passion, Death and Resurrection of his Son Jesus Christ. From the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit never ceases to communicate the power of Christ's Kingship, and to invite men and women to find salvation in the One who is "the Way, and the Truth, and the Life" (Cf. Jn. 14: 6).

In order to bring us this salvation, Jesus established the Church to be "a kind of *sacrament* – a sign and instrument – of *intimate union with God and of the unity of all mankind*" (*Lumen Gentium*, 1). Among the many magnificent images which the Bible uses to describe the Church, one of the most beautiful is that of *the house in which God dwells with his people* (Cf. Eph. 2, 19-22; 1Tim. 3: 15). The Lord wants his Church to "make a home" in the midst of every people, grafting the gifts of salvation on to the history and culture of each nation. In today's Gospel, Jesus sends his disciples into people's houses, to bring them his peace (Lk. 10: 5). In every place where people make their homes and live their lives, a disciple of Jesus must arrive to say: "The Kingdom of God is at hand" (Cf. *ibid.* 10: 9).

4. Tonight we give thanks to God for the way in which the Church has "made a home" *in America*. From the beginning, in this new land the Church grew out of the faith of peoples from many

cultural and ethnic backgrounds, embracing the indigenous people and settlers alike. Everywhere we see the results of the labors of countless priests, Religious sisters and brothers, Christian families and individual lay men and women who made the Church present in American society through a great network of parishes, schools, hospitals and charitable institutions. This proud heritage should serve as an inspiration and an incentive for you as you seek to meet the challenges of our own times.

The Church must continue to build God's spiritual house in America! Here in the Church in Newark, last year's *Archdiocesan Synod* put the whole Catholic community in a state of mission. In particular, the Synod appealed to the laity to work for God's Kingdom by their efforts to shape society in accordance with God's designs. No aspect of life – whether in the family, in the workplace, in schools, in economic, political or social activities – can be withdrawn from God's dominion (Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 36). As we prepare to celebrate the two thousandth anniversary of Christ's Birth, your Synod, like the whole Church, recognized the need for *a new evangelization*, a new and vital proclamation of the Gospel aimed at integrating your faith ever more fully into the fabric of your daily lives. In the words of the Second Vatican Council, wherever there is little concern for seeking what is true and good, and wherever conscience is blinded by being accustomed to sin (Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 16), there the Church must make a supreme effort to teach the objective truths of the moral order, form consciences, call people to conversion and make present the inexhaustible riches of God's mercy in the Sacraments, and especially in the Sacrament of Penance.

5. The Christian life is a dynamic reality: the seed of faith sown in our hearts through Baptism must ripen and mature into a rich harvest of union with God and good works in the service of others. Jesus uses *the image of the harvest* to describe the Church's role in the world. From generation to generation, in every time and place, the seed sown by God in human history through the Death and Resurrection of Christ continues to mature and awaits the harvest.

Jesus reminds us that *more workers for the harvest are urgently needed*, and he commands us to pray for them: "The harvest is rich but the workers are few; therefore ask the harvest-master to send workers to his harvest" (Lk. 10: 2). The question of vocations is vital to the Church. Everyone has a vocation: parents, teachers, students, workers, professional people, people who are retired. *Everyone has something to do for God.* We must pray that young people especially will listen to the Lord's call to serve as priests, as Religious sisters and brothers, as missionaries at home and in other lands. Young people of Newark and New Jersey, young Americans, the Lord needs you! The Church needs you!

6. Compared to many other parts of the world, the United States is a privileged land. Yet, even here there is much poverty and human suffering. There is much need for love and the works of love; there is need for social solidarity. Early Americans were proud of their strong sense of individual responsibility, but that did not lead them to build a radically 'individualistic' society. They

built a community-based society, with a great openness and sensitivity to the needs of their neighbors.

Quite close to the shores of New Jersey there rises a universally-known landmark which stands as an enduring witness to the American tradition of welcoming the stranger, and which tells us something important about the kind of nation America has aspired to be. It is the *Statue of Liberty*, with its celebrated poem: "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free... Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me". Is present-day America becoming less sensitive, less caring towards the poor, the weak, the stranger, the needy? It must not! Today, as before, the United States is called to be *a hospitable society, a welcoming culture*. If America were to turn in on itself, would this not be the beginning of the end of what constitutes the very essence of the "American experience"?

To a great extent, the story of America has been the story of long and difficult struggles to overcome the prejudices which excluded certain categories of people from a full share in the country's life: first, the struggle against religious intolerance, then the struggle against racial discrimination and in favor of civil rights for everyone. Sadly, today a new class of people is being excluded. When *the unborn child* – the "stranger in the womb" – is declared to be *beyond the protection of society*, not only are America's deepest traditions radically undermined and endangered, but a moral blight is brought upon society. I am also thinking of threats to the elderly, the severely handicapped and all those who do not seem to have any social usefulness. When innocent human beings are declared inconvenient or burdensome, and thus unworthy of legal and social protection, grievous damage is done to the moral foundations of the democratic community. The right to life is the first of all rights. It is the foundation of democratic liberties and the keystone of the edifice of civil society. *Both as Americans and as followers of Christ, American Catholics* must be committed to the defense of life in all its stages and in every condition.

7. Dear Sisters and Brothers: Christ pointed the Church and the whole human family toward the future when he rolled away the stone from the entrance to the tomb and unveiled the mystery of new life. In his Resurrection, the Lord revealed the new creation, the promise of new heavens and a new earth (Cf. 2Pt. 3: 13). As Christians, we live by faith and in hope. We wait for the return of the Lord as the judge of the living and the dead. We await his return in glory, *the coming of God's Kingdom in its fullness*. That is the constant invitation of the Psalms: "*Wait for the Lord with courage; be stouthearted, and wait for the Lord*" (Ps. 27(26): 14).

Our confidence in the future which God has opened before us enables us to see this earthly life in its proper light. In the perspective of God's Kingdom we discern the true value of all the accomplishments of human civilization and culture, of all our achievements, our struggles and our sufferings. As Americans, you are rightly proud of your country's great achievements. As Christians, you know that *all things human are the soil in which the Kingdom of God is meant to take root and mature!* To the Church in the United States, to you, the Church in Newark, I make

this appeal: Do not make an idol of any temporal reality! *"Know that the Kingdom of God is at hand"* (Cf. Lk. 10: 11). *"Wait for the Lord with courage; be stouthearted"* (Ps. 27(26): 14). *Hope in the Lord! Amen.*