



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

RECITATION OF THE HOLY ROSARY

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

*St. Patrick's Cathedral, New York
Saturday, 7 October 1995*

*Dear Cardinal O'Connor and my other Brother Cardinals and Bishops,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,
and Distinguished Guests,*

1. It is a great joy for me to be here once more in Saint Patrick's Cathedral, which is a kind of spiritual landmark for all New Yorkers; in a sense, for all Catholics in the United States.

From this "house of God", I greet the "household of God in the Spirit" (Cf. Eph. 2: 19): all who have been given "a new birth... unto hope which draws its life from the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1Pt. 1: 3). In the first place I hail my dear friend Cardinal O'Connor, the Shepherd of this huge Archdiocese, whose dauntless leadership you all know. I greet all of you who have prayed the Rosary with me here today on the very Feast of the Holy Rosary, especially the sick and the handicapped. I offer respectful greetings as well to the civil authorities of City, State and Nation.

2. I am pleased that Cardinal O'Connor has invited two very special categories of people to pray together this afternoon: *representatives of the Religious Institutes* in the Archdiocese, and *families from every one of the over four hundred Parishes*. These vocations complement each other. The family, the typical lay vocation, witnesses to God's presence in history, through the mutual love of the spouses and their service to life. Religious, living the radical consecration of the evangelical counsels, *bear witness that God is absolute* and that his Kingdom of justice, peace and love is our

supreme destiny. Both vocations therefore play an essential part in the Church's mission and in the great enterprise of humanizing the world.

3. *Dear Religious*, by following Christ along the "narrow and hard way" (Cf. Mt. 7: 14), you experience how true it is that "with him is plenteous redemption": *copiosa apud eum redemptio* (Ps. 131(130): 7). For some of you, perhaps, this has been a cross made heavy by temptations to doubt the meaning and purpose of your witness, by attacks on the religious life and on the Church herself. But, your fidelity has withstood the challenges from within and without, and remains a singular example to a world so much in need of the "newness of life in Christ" (Cf. Rom. 6: 4) which is made present through the self-giving love that inspires your entire lives (Cf. *Perfectae Caritatis*, 1).

Every day in my prayer I praise and thank the Father of mercies for the heroic efforts of so many women and men Religious who live by "the law of the Spirit, the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8: 2). We must beseech God that, by his grace and through the intercession of Mary and your holy founders and foundresses, *a new Pentecost will take hold in consecrated life* so that it will become clear to everyone, especially the young, that *religious life is a vital, necessary force in the Church*. To each one of you and to all the faithful Religious of the United States, in words taken from the Letter to the Hebrews I say: "Do not, then, surrender your confidence; it will have great reward" (Hebr. 10: 35). Society needs your prophetic and unmistakable testimony of God's closeness.

4. *Dear Families*, Dear mothers, fathers, daughters, sons, brothers, sisters, grandparents: I was supposed to come to New York last year for the celebration of the United Nations' *Year of the Family*. In the "*Letter to Families*" which I wrote on that occasion, I indicated that "the family is placed at the center of the great struggle between good and evil, between life and death, between love and all that is opposed to love" (John Paul II, *Letter to Families*, 23). The family therefore is at the heart of the Church's mission and of her concern for humanity.

When a man and a woman bind themselves to each other without reservation in their decision to be faithful "in sickness and in health, in good times and in bad", to the exclusion of every other physical love, they become cooperators with the Creator in bringing new life into the world. You parents can look with love at your children and say: this is "flesh of my flesh" (Gen. 2: 23). Your life is defined by your fatherly and motherly desire and duty to give your children the best: a loving home, an upbringing, a healthy and positive start on the road of life, now and for eternity. Above all, *through Baptism you make it possible for your children to become God's beloved sons and daughters, mystically united with Christ, incorporated into his Church!* Consider how important it is for you *to foster the life of faith and the life of grace in yourselves and in your children*. Beneath the high altar of this Cathedral, together with the former Cardinals and Archbishops of New York, there is buried the *Servant of God Pierre Toussaint*, a married man, a one-time slave from Haiti. What is so extraordinary about this man? He radiated a most serene and joyful faith, nourished daily by the Eucharist and visits to the Blessed Sacrament. In the face of constant, painful discrimination

he understood, as few have understood, the meaning of the words: "Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing" (Lk. 23: 34). No treasure is as uplifting and transforming as the light of faith.

From many points of view, these are difficult times for parents who wish to pass on to their children the treasure of the Catholic faith. Sometimes you yourselves are not sure what the Church stands for. There are false teachers and dissenting voices. Bad examples cause great harm. Furthermore, a self-indulgent culture undermines many of the values which are at the basis of sound family life.

5. There are two immediate things which the Catholic families of America can do to strengthen home-life. *The first is prayer*: both personal and family prayer. Prayer raises our minds and hearts to God to thank him for his blessings, to ask him for his help. It brings the saving power of Jesus Christ into the decisions and actions of everyday life.

One prayer in particular I recommend to families: the one we have just been praying, *the Rosary*. And especially the Joyful Mysteries, which help us to meditate on the Holy Family of Nazareth. Uniting her will with the will of God, Mary conceived the Christ Child, and became the model of every mother carrying her unborn child. By visiting her cousin Elizabeth, Mary took to another family the healing presence of Jesus. Mary gave birth to the Infant Jesus in the humblest of circumstances and presented him to Simeon in the Temple, as every baby may be presented to God in Baptism. Mary and Joseph worried over the lost Child before they found him in the Temple, so that parents of all generations would know that the trials and sorrows of family life are the road to closer union with Jesus. To use a phrase made famous by the late Father Patrick Peyton: *The family that prays together, stays together!*

6. The second suggestion I make to families is to use the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* to learn about the faith and to answer the questions that come up, especially the moral questions which confront everyone today. Dear Parents, you are *educators because you are parents*. I *exhort and encourage* the Bishops and the whole Church in the United States to help parents to fulfill their vocation to be the first and most important teachers of the faith to their children. And I wish to say a special word of thanks to all those who make sacrifices, sometimes heroic sacrifices, to ensure that Catholic children receive formation in the faith either through the Catholic School system or through Religious Education Programs in your parishes. I know that the Archdiocese of New York is proud of its Catholic schools and its Religious Education Programs. Immense effort goes into these undertakings, in the face of great odds. May God reward everyone involved!

7. Families in difficulties or couples in irregular situations also have a claim on the Church's pastoral care. Other stronger and spiritually mature families can play a wonderful role in bringing encouragement and help to such couples and families. Every strengthening of family bonds is a victory for society. I appeal to all of you *to promote respect for the mystery of life and love* which

God has entrusted in a special way to families.

And to Religious, I appeal to you to be, in the heart of the Church in the United States, what the Second Vatican Council called you: "a blazing emblem of the heavenly kingdom" (*Perfectae Caritatis*, 1).

God bless you all!

God bless the Church in New York!