



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO AMERICA

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

*Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mexico City
Saturday, 23 January 1999*

*Beloved Brothers in the Episcopate and the Priesthood,
Dear Brothers and Sisters in the Lord,*

1. "*When the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman ...*" (Gal 4:4). What is the fullness of time? From the *standpoint of human history*, the fullness of time is a concrete fact. It is the night when the Son of God came into the world in Bethlehem, as foretold by the prophets and as we have heard in the first reading: "The Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, a young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and you shall call his name Emmanuel" (Is 7:14). These words, spoken many centuries ago, were fulfilled on the night when the Son conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary entered the world.

Christ's birth was preceded by the message of the angel Gabriel. Afterwards, Mary went to the home of her cousin Elizabeth to be of service to her. We were reminded of this by the Gospel of Luke, which puts before us Elizabeth's unusual, prophetic greeting and Mary's splendid response: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour" (1:46-47). These are the events referred to in today's liturgy.

2. The reading from the Letter to the Galatians, for its part, reveals to us the divine dimension of this fullness of time. The words of the Apostle Paul sum up the whole theology of Jesus' birth, at the same time explaining the meaning of this fullness. It is something extraordinary: *God has entered human history*. God, who in himself is the unfathomable mystery of life; God, who is Father and is himself reflected from all eternity in the Son, consubstantial with him and through whom all things were made (cf. Jn 1:1, 3); God, who is the unity of the Father and the Son in the flow of eternal love which is the Holy Spirit.

Despite the poverty of our words for expressing the ineffable mystery of the Trinity, the truth is that

man, in his temporal condition, has been called to share in this divine life. The Son of God was born of the Virgin Mary to obtain this divine adoption for us. The Father has poured out in our hearts the Spirit of his Son, through whom we can say "*Abba, Father!*" (cf. Gal 4:4). Here, then, is the fullness of time which fulfils all the yearnings of history and of humanity: the revelation of God's mystery, given to human beings through the gift of divine adoption.

3. The fullness of time to which the Apostle refers is related to human history. By becoming man, God in a certain way has entered our time and has transformed our history into the history of salvation. A history that includes all the vicissitudes of the world and of mankind, from creation to their conclusion, but advances through important moments and dates. One of them is the 2,000th year, now close at hand, since the birth of Jesus, the year of the Great Jubilee, for which the Church has also been preparing by holding Extraordinary Synods dedicated to each continent, such as the one held in the Vatican at the end of 1997.

4. Today in this Basilica of Guadalupe, the Marian heart of America, we thank God for the Special Assembly for America of the Synod of Bishops - a true Upper Room of ecclesial communion and collegial affection among all the Pastors from the north, centre and south of the continent - shared with the Bishop of Rome as a fraternal experience of encounter with the risen Lord, the way to conversion, communion and solidarity in America.

Now, one year after the celebration of that Synod Assembly, and in conjunction with the centenary of the Plenary Council of Latin America held in Rome, I have come here to place at the feet of the mestiza Virgin of Tepeyac, Star of the New World, the Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in America*, which incorporates the contributions and pastoral suggestions of that Synod, entrusting to the Mother and Queen of this continent the future of its evangelization.

5. I wish to express my gratitude to those whose work and prayer enabled that Synod Assembly to reflect the vitality of the Catholic faith in America. I also thank this Primatial Archdiocese of Mexico City and its Archbishop, Cardinal Norberto Rivera Carrera, for their cordial welcome and generous cooperation. I affectionately greet the large group of Cardinals and Bishops who have come from every part of the continent and the great many priests and seminarians present here, who fill the Pope's heart with joy and hope. My greeting also extends beyond the walls of this basilica to embrace those who are following the celebration from outside, as well as to all the men and women of various cultures, ethnic groups and nations which form the rich and multifaceted reality of America.

6. "*Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her from the Lord*" (Lk 1:45). Elizabeth's words to Mary, who is carrying Christ in her womb, can also be applied to the Church on this continent. Blessed are you, Church in America, for you have welcomed the Good News of the Gospel and given birth in faith to numerous peoples! Blessed are you for believing, blessed are you for hoping, blessed are you for loving, because the Lord's

promise will be fulfilled! The heroic missionary efforts and the wonderful evangelization of these five centuries were not in vain. Today we can say that, as a result, the Church in America is the Church of Hope. We need only look at the vigour of her many young people, the exceptional value put on the family, the blossoming of vocations to the priesthood and the consecrated life and, above all, the deep piety of her peoples. Let us not forget that in the next millennium, now close at hand, America will be the continent with the largest number of Catholics.

7. However, as the Synod Fathers stressed, if the Church in America has many reasons to rejoice, she also faces serious problems and important challenges. Should we be discouraged by all that? Not at all: "*Jesus Christ is Lord!*" (Phil 2:11). He has conquered the world and sent his Holy Spirit to make all things new. Would it be too ambitious to hope that after this Synod Assembly - the first American Synod in history - a more evangelical way of living and sharing would grow on this continent where Christians are the majority? There are many areas where the Christian communities of North, Central and South America can demonstrate their fraternal ties, practise real solidarity and collaborate on joint pastoral projects, with each one contributing the spiritual and material wealth at its disposal.

8. The Apostle Paul teaches us that in the fullness of time God sent his Son, born of a woman, to redeem us from sin and to make us his sons and daughters. Accordingly, we are no longer servants but children and heirs of God (cf. Gal 4:4-7). Therefore, the Church must proclaim the Gospel of life and speak out with prophetic force against the culture of death. May the Continent of Hope also be the Continent of Life! This is our cry: life with dignity for all! For all who have been conceived in their mother's womb, for street children, for Guadalupe! To you we present this countless multitude of the faithful praying to God in America. You who have penetrated their hearts, visit and comfort the homes, parishes and Dioceses of the whole continent. Grant that Christian families may exemplarily raise their children in the Church's faith and in love of the Gospel, so that they will be the seed of apostolic vocations. Turn your gaze today upon young people and encourage them to walk with Jesus Christ. O Lady and Mother of America! Strengthen the will be celebrated throughout America with the liturgical rank of feast.

O Mother! You know the paths followed by the first evangelizers of the New World, from Guanahani Island and Hispaniola to the Amazon forests and the Andean peaks, reaching to Tierra del Fuego in the south and to the Great Lakes and mountains of the north. Accompany the Church which is working in the nations of America, so that she may always preach the Gospel and renew her missionary spirit. Encourage all who devote their lives to the cause of Jesus and the spread of his kingdom. O gentle Lady of Tepeyac, Mother of indigenous peoples and Afro-Americans, for immigrants and refugees, for the young deprived of opportunity, for the old, for those who suffer any kind of poverty or marginalization.

Dear brothers and sisters, the time has come to banish once and for all from the continent every attack against life. No more violence, terrorism and drug-trafficking! No more torture or other forms

of abuse! There must be an end to the unnecessary recourse to the death penalty! No more exploitation of the weak, racial discrimination or ghettos of poverty! Never again! These are intolerable evils which cry out to heaven and call Christians to a different way of living, to a social commitment more in keeping with their faith. We must rouse the consciences of men and women with the Gospel, in order to highlight their sublime vocation as children of God. This will inspire them to build a better America. As a matter of urgency, we must stir up a new springtime of holiness on the continent so that action and contemplation will go hand in hand.

9. I wish to entrust and offer the future of the continent to Blessed Mary, Mother of Christ and of the Church. For this reason, I have the joy now of announcing that I have declared that on 12 December Our Lady of Guadalupe faith of our brothers and sisters, so that in all areas of social, professional, cultural and political life they may act in accord with the truth and the new law which Jesus brought to humanity. Look with mercy on the distress of those suffering from hunger, loneliness, rejection or ignorance. Make us recognize them as your favourite children and give us the fervent charity to help them in their needs.

Holy Virgin of Guadalupe, Queen of Peace! Save the nations and peoples of this continent. Teach everyone, political leaders and citizens, to live in true freedom and to act according to the requirements of justice and respect for human rights, so that peace may thus be established once and for all.

To you, O Lady of Guadalupe, Mother of Jesus and our Mother, belong all the love, honour, glory and endless praise of your American sons and daughters!

At the end of Mass the Holy Father said in Spanish:

Thank you for this splendid gift which I will take with me. I had the joy once again of celebrating in this basilica which is loved so much by all Mexicans, all Americans, children of peace. I thank you for the prayers you offer each day for me and for my Petrine ministry. I know that you will always continue to do so. Thank you.