



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO IRELAND

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II TO PRIESTS, MISSIONARIES, RELIGIOUS BROTHERS AND SISTERS

St Patrick's College, Maynooth

Monday, 1st October 1979

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

1. The name of Maynooth is respected all over the Catholic world. It recalls what is noblest in the Catholic priesthood in Ireland. Here come seminarists from every Irish diocese, sons of Catholic homes which were themselves true "seminaries", true seed-beds of priestly or religious vocations. From here have gone out priests to every Irish diocese and to the dioceses of the far-flung Irish diaspora. Maynooth has, in this century, given birth to two new Missionary Societies, one initially directed towards China, the other towards Africa; and it has sent out hundreds of alumni as volunteers to the mission fields. Maynooth is a school of priestly holiness, an academy of theological learning, a university of Catholic inspiration. Saint Patrick's College is a place of rich achievement, which promises a future just as great.

Therefore Maynooth is a fitting place in which to meet and talk with priests, diocesan and religious, with religious brothers, religious sisters, missionaries and seminarians. Having, as a priest-student in Paris, lived for a time in the atmosphere of an Irish Seminary—the Collège Irlandais in Paris, now loaned by the Irish Bishops to the Hierarchy of Poland—I have profound joy in meeting with you all here in Ireland's National Seminary.

2. My first words go to the priests, diocesan and religious. I say to you what Saint Paul said to Timothy. I ask you "to fan into a flame the gift that God gave you when (the Bishop) laid (his) hands on you" (2 Tim 1 :6). Jesus Christ himself, the one High Priest said: "I have come to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were blazing already !" (Lk 12 :49). You share in his priesthood;

you carry on his work in the world. His work cannot be done by lukewarm or half-hearted priests. His fire of love for the Father and for men must burn in you. His longing to save mankind must consume you.

You are called by Christ as the apostles were. You are appointed like them, to be with Christ. You are sent, as they were, to go out in his name, and by his authority, to "make disciples of all the nations" (cf. *Mt* 10:1; 28:19; *Mk* 3:13-16).

Your first duty is to be *with Christ*. You are each called to be "a witness to his Resurrection" (*Acts* 1:22). A constant danger with priests, even zealous priests, is that they become so immersed in the work of the Lord that they neglect the Lord of the work.

We must find time, we must make time, to be with the Lord in prayer. Following the example of the Lord Jesus himself, we must "always go off to some place where (we can) be alone and pray" (cf. *Lk* 5:16). It is only if we spend time with the Lord that our sending out to others will be also a bringing of him to others.

3. To be with the Lord is always also to be sent by him to do his work. A priest is *called* by Christ; a priest is *with* Christ; a priest is *sent* by Christ. A priest is sent in the power of the same Holy Spirit which drove Jesus untiringly along the roads of life, the roads of history. Whatever the difficulties, the disappointments, the set-backs, we priests find in Christ and in the power of his Spirit the strength to "struggle wearily on, helped only by his power driving (us) irresistibly" (cf. *Col* 1:29).

As priests, you are privileged to be pastors of a faithful people, who continue to respond generously to your ministry, and who are a strong support to your own priestly vocation through their faith and their prayer. If you keep striving to be the kind of priest your people expect and wish you to be, then you will be holy priests. The degree of religious practice in Ireland is high. For this we must be constantly thanking God. But will this high level of religious practice continue? Will the next generation of young Irishmen and Irish women still be as faithful as their fathers were? After my two days in Ireland, after [my meeting with Ireland's youth in Galway](#), I am confident that they will. But this will require both unremitting work and untiring prayer on your part. You must work for the Lord with a sense of urgency. You must work with the conviction that this generation, this decade of the 1980's which we are about to enter, could be crucial and decisive for the future of the faith in Ireland. Let there be no complacency. As Saint Paul said: "Be awake to all the dangers; stay firm in the faith; be brave and be strong" (*1 Cor* 16:13). Work with confidence; work with joy. You are witnesses to the Resurrection of Christ.

4. What the people expect from you, more than anything else, is faithfulness to the priesthood. This is what speaks to them of the faithfulness of God. This is what strengthens them to be faithful to Christ through all the difficulties of their lives, of their marriages. In a world so marked by

instability as our world today, we need more signs and witnesses to God's fidelity to us, and to the fidelity we owe to him. This is what causes such great sadness to the Church, such great but often silent anguish among the people of God, when priests fail in their fidelity to their priestly commitment. That counter-sign, that counter-witness, has been one of the setbacks to the great hopes for renewal aroused throughout the Church by the Second Vatican Council. Yet this has also driven priests, and the whole Church, to more intense and fervent prayer; for it has taught us all that without Christ we can do nothing (cf. *Jn 15 :5*). And the fidelity of the immense majority of priests has shone with even greater clarity and is all the more manifest and glorious a witness to the faithful God, and to Christ, the Faithful Witness (cf. *Rev 1:5*).

5. In a centre of theological learning, which is also a seminary, like Maynooth, this witness of fidelity has the added importance and the special value of impressing on candidates for the priesthood the strength and the grandeur of priestly fidelity. Here in Maynooth, theological learning, being part of formation for the priesthood, is preserved from ever being an academic pursuit of the intellect only. Here theological scholarship is linked with liturgy, with prayer, with the building of a community of faith and love, and thus with the building up, the "edifying", of the priesthood of Ireland, and the edifying of the Church. My call today is a call to prayer. Only in prayer will we meet the challenges of our ministry and fulfil the hopes of tomorrow. All our appeals for peace and reconciliation can be effective only through prayer.

This theological learning, here as everywhere throughout the Church, is a reflection on faith, a reflection in faith. A theology which did not deepen faith and lead to prayer might be a discourse on words about God ; it could not be a discourse about God, the Living God, the God who is and whose being is *Love*. It follows that theology can only be authentic in the Church, the community of faith. Only when the teaching of theologians is in conformity with the teaching of the College of Bishops, united with the Pope, can the people of God know with certitude that that teaching is "the faith which has been once and for all entrusted to the Saints" (*Jude 3*). This is not a limitation for theologians, but a liberation ; for it preserves them from subservience to changing fashions and binds them securely to the unchanging truth of Christ, the truth which makes us free (cf. *Jn 8:32*).

6. In Maynooth, in Ireland, to speak of priesthood is to speak of mission. Ireland has never forgotten that "the pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature; for it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she takes her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father" (*Ad Gentes*, 2). In the ninth and tenth centuries, Irish monks rekindled the light of faith in regions where it had burnt low or been extinguished by the collapse of the Roman Empire, and evangelized new nations not yet evangelized, including areas of my own native Poland. How can I forget that there was an Irish monastery as far east as Kiev, even up to the thirteenth century; and that there was even an Irish college for a short time in my own city of Cracow, during the persecution of Cromwell. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Irish priests followed their exiles all over the English-speaking world. In the twentieth century, new missionary institutes of men and women sprang up in Ireland, which, together with the Irish branches of international

missionary institutes and with existing Irish religious congregations, gave a new missionary impetus to the Church.

May that missionary spirit never decline in the hearts of Irish priests, whether members of missionary institutes or of the diocesan clergy or of religious congregations devoted to other apostolates. May this spirit be actively fostered by all of you among the laity, already so devoted in their prayer, so generous in their support for the missions. May a spirit of partnership grow between the home dioceses and the home religious congregations in the total mission of the Church, until each local diocesan church and each religious congregation and community is fully seen to be "missionary of its very nature", entering into the eager missionary movement of the universal Church.

I have learned with much pleasure that the Irish Missionary Union plans to establish a National Missionary Centre, which will both serve as a focus for missionary renewal by missionaries themselves and foster the missionary awareness of the clergy, religious and faithful of the Irish Church. May its work be blessed by God. May it contribute to a great new upsurge of missionary fervour and a new wave of missionary vocations from this great motherland of faith which is Ireland.

7. I wish to speak a special word to religious Brothers. The past decade has brought great changes, and with them problems and trials unprecedented in all your previous experience. I ask you not to be discouraged. Be men of great truth, of great and unbounded hope. "May the God of hope bring you such joy and peace in your faith that the power of the Holy Spirit will remove all bounds to hope" (*Rom 15 :13*). The past decade has also brought a great renewal in your understanding of your holy vocation, a great deepening of your liturgical lives and your prayer, a great extension of the field of your apostolic influence. I ask God to bless you with renewed fidelity in your vocation among your members, and with increased vocations to your Institutes. The Church in Ireland and on the missions owes much to all the Institutes of Brothers. Your call to holiness is a precious adornment of the Church. Believe in your vocation. Be faithful to it. "God has called you and he will not fail you" (*1 Thess 5 :23*).

8. The Sisters too have known years of searching, sometimes perhaps of uncertainty or of unrest. These have also been years of purification. I pray that we are now entering a period of consolidation and of construction. Many of you are engaged in the apostolate of education and the pastoral care of youth. Do not doubt the continuing relevance of that apostolate, particularly in modern Ireland, where youth are such a large and important part of the population. The Church has repeatedly, in many solemn recent documents, reminded religious of the primary importance of education, and has invited congregations of men and women with the tradition and the charism of education to persevere in that vocation and to redouble their commitment to it. The same is true of the traditional apostolates of care of the sick, nursing, care of the aged, the handicapped, the poor. These must not be neglected while new apostolates are being undertaken. In the words of

the Gospel, you must "bring out from (your) storeroom things both new and old" (cf. *Mt*13 :52). You must be courageous in your apostolic undertakings, not letting difficulties, shortage of personnel, insecurity for the future, deter or depress you.

But remember always that your first field of apostolate is your own personal lives. Here is where the message of the Gospel has first to be preached and lived. Your first apostolic duty is your own sanctification. No change in religious life has any importance unless it be also conversion of yourselves to Christ. No movement in religious life has any value unless it be also movement inwards to the "still centre" of your existence, where Christ is. It is not what you *do* that matters most; but what you *are*, as women consecrated to God. For you, Christ has consecrated himself, so that you too "may be consecrated in truth" (cf. *Jn* 17:19).

9. To you and to priests, diocesan and religious, I say: Rejoice to be witnesses to Christ in the modern world. Do not hesitate to be recognizable, identifiable, in the streets as men and women who have consecrated their lives to God and who have given up everything worldly to follow Christ. Believe in the value for contemporary men and women of the visible signs of your consecrated lives. People need signs and reminders of God in the modern secular city, which has few reminders of God left. Do not help the trend towards "taking God off the streets" by adopting secular modes of dress and behaviour yourselves !

10. My special blessing and greeting goes to the cloistered Sisters and contemplatives, men as well as women. I express to you my gratitude for what you have done for me by your lives of prayer and sacrifice since my papal ministry began. I express the Pope's need for you, the Church's need for you. You are foremost in that "great, intense and growing prayer" for which I called in *Redemptor Hominis*. Never was the contemplative vocation more precious or more relevant than in our modern restless world. May there be many Irish boys and girls called to the contemplative life, at this time when the future of the Church and the future of humanity depends on prayer.

Gladly do I repeat to all contemplatives, on this feast of Saint Theresa of Lisieux, the words I used in [addressing the Sisters of Rome](#) : "I commend to you the Church; I commend mankind and the world to you. To you, to your prayers, to your 'holocaust' I commend also myself, Bishop of Rome. Be with me, close to me, you who are in the heart of the Church ! May there be fulfilled in each of you that which was the programme of life for Saint Theresa of the Child Jesus : 'in corde Ecclesiae amor ero'—'I will be love in the heart of the Church' !". Much of what I have been saying has been intended also for the seminarians. You are preparing for the total giving of yourselves to Christ and to the service of his Kingdom. You bring to Christ the gift of your youthful enthusiasm and vitality. In you Christ is eternally youthful ; and through you he gives youth to the Church. Do not disappoint him. Do not disappoint the people who are waiting for you to bring Christ to them. Do not fail your generation of young Irish men and women. Bring Christ to the young people of your generation as the only answer to their longings. Christ looks on you and loves you. Do not, like the

young man in the Gospel, go away sad, "because he had great possessions" (cf. *Mt* 19 :22). Instead, bring all your possessions of mind and hand and heart to Christ, that he may use them to draw all men to himself (cf. *Jn* 12 :32).

To all of you I say: this is a wonderful time in the history of the Church. This is a wonderful time to be a priest, to be a religious, to be a missionary for Christ. Rejoice in the Lord always. Rejoice in your vocation. I repeat to you the words of Saint Paul : "I want you to be happy, always happy in the Lord; I repeat, what I want is your happiness. There is no need to worry; but if there is anything you need, pray for it, asking God for it with prayer and thanksgiving, and that peace of God which is so much greater than we can understand, will guard your hearts and your thoughts, in Christ Jesus" (*Phil* 4:4-7).

Mary, Mother of Christ, the Eternal Priest, Mother of priests and of religious, will keep you from all anxiety, as you "wait in joyful hope for the coming of our Saviour, Jesus Christ". Entrust yourselves to her, as I commend you to her, to Mary, Mother of Jesus and Mother of his Church.

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