



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO GREAT BRITAIN

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE OF SCOTLAND

*Edinburgh
Tuesday, 1 June 1982*

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

1. We have assembled this evening in the name of Jesus Christ, who is “the Shepherd and Bishop” of our souls (*1 Petr.* 2, 25), “the chief Shepherd” of the flock (*Ibid.* 5, 14).

We are here *to reflect on our episcopal ministry* and to offer it to the Father through Christ our Lord, in whose name we exercise it. There are certainly many factors that affect our ministry and call for our response as leaders of God’s people. And we have so many of these factors very much before our eyes at this time, when preoccupation for peace and reconciliation is so paramount in our minds. On such an occasion as this we perceive many obligations incumbent on us, precisely because we have been charged with “the ministry of reconciliation” (*2 Cor.* 5, 18), precisely because we are called to preach a Gospel of peace.

2. But basic to the whole identity of a Bishop is the fact that he is meant to be *the living sign of Jesus Christ*. “In the Bishops,” states the Second Vatican Council, “our Lord Jesus Christ, the supreme High Priest is present in the midst of those who believe” (*Lumen Gentium*, 21).

3. This basic truth gives us a deep insight into ourselves and *our need for holiness of life*. The supernatural effectiveness of our ministry is linked in so many ways to our degree of holiness - to the degree in which we are configured to Christ by charity and grace. For this reason we should accept Saint Paul’s invitation as being directed mainly to ourselves: “Put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (*Eph.* 4, 24).

Like Jesus we are *called to preach conversion*, to echo the words that he proclaimed so early in his public ministry: “Repent, and believe in the Gospel” (*Marc. 1, 14*). But here too our effectiveness depends on our openness to grace; we ourselves are meant *to experience the conversion that we proclaim*. Holiness therefore becomes for us, as I mentioned to another group of Bishops on another occasion, “the first priority in our lives and in our ministry” (*AAS 71 (1979) 1220*).

4. There is no doubt about it: our fidelity to the love of Jesus and our friendship with him are essential for all the apostolic works that are part of our daily lives. This fidelity to love, this friendship with the Christ whose Kingdom we proclaim must be *nourished by our own prayer life*. Only union with Christ makes it possible for us to be effective ministers of the Gospel. Let us remember the words of Jesus: “He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit” (*Jo. 15, 5*).

5. As Bishops we are asked to meditate on the holiness of Christ. Indeed our people ask us for more than this: they want, and they need, the witness of a prophetic anticipation of the holiness to which we invite them. They ask us to be their *leaders in holiness*, to trace out clearly for them the path for following Christ.

And so we must be, in the expression of Saint Peter, “examples to the flock” (*1 Petr. 5, 3*) - in leading the way in saying yes to God, yes to others, yes to the highest ideals of Christian life.

6. While the challenge is great, so also is the power of Christ’s grace. Through adoration of the *Eucharist* you will find light and strength, gladness of heart, inspiration and the greatest means of holiness. And as the chief priest leading your people assembled for worship in the Eucharistic Sacrifice you will find the fulfilment of your episcopal ministry.

In your own use of the *Sacrament of Penance* you will find renewed contact with the Christ whose compassionate representatives you are and who calls you personally to ever renewed conversion and holiness of life. You will find the means to give new assurance to your priests and people of the extreme relevance of this sacrament in the Church today. From your whole way of life - a life of union with God through prayer and penance - you will be still more zealous preachers of the mystery of salvation and eternal life: *Ex abundantia enim cordis os eius loquitur* (*Luc. 6, 45*).

7. Indeed, everything in your lives, the whole apostolate of Scotland, will be seen from the vantage point of *companionship with the Christ* who has chosen you to preach his “unsearchable riches” (*Eph. 6, 45*), to plead for peace, and to give your lives as he did, for the flock.

Dear brother Bishops, in this collegial meeting this evening we have the wonderful opportunity to rededicate ourselves, together, to our episcopal ministry at the service of Christ and his Church. And in the vision that we have of this ministry we must always remember that Jesus Christ has

first place in our lives. It was Christ who appointed the Twelve: “to be with him and to be sent out . . .” (*Marc. 3, 14*).

8. This is our calling too, for ever: *to be with Christ* and by him *to be sent out* - together - to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of God. Through your holiness, and the holiness of the local Churches over which you preside and which you serve, may this Good News continue to spread throughout Scotland, for the glory of the Most Holy Trinity - Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

May Mary, Queen of Peace and Mother of the Church, intercede for you and for all those who through your word will believe in the name of her Son, Jesus Christ.

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