



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO A GROUP OF BISHOPS FROM THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
ON THEIR «AD LIMINA APOSTOLORUM» VISIT**

Saturday, 9 July 1983

Dear Brothers in our Lord Jesus Christ,

1. It is a very great joy for me to be with you today during this collegial meeting. You come from Dioceses stretching across your country: from Baltimore, the primatial See of *the United States*, to Fairbanks in Alaska. You bring with you the hopes and aspirations, the joys and the sorrows of a great number of the Catholic faithful of America. Sharing, as we do, a common pastoral responsibility for these local Churches of yours, we have at the same time the opportunity to offer them to Jesus Christ, the Chief Pastor of the universal Church. I ask him, by the power of his Resurrection, to sustain you all in the hope of your calling: to strengthen your priests, religious and laity - the whole People of God whom you serve with dedication, sacrifice and love.

In examining the many relevant topics which the Episcopal Conference offered to my consideration, and for which I thank you, I have noted one that concerns *the celebration of Sunday* - the strengthening of the Lord's Day. And I am pleased to reflect briefly with you on this issue of such capital importance, and in particular on the Sunday *Eucharistic celebration*. I pray that you in turn may confirm your people in a matter that profoundly touches their lives as individuals and as a community. Throughout the United States there has been a superb history of Eucharistic participation by the people, and for this we must all thank God.

2. In the whole tradition of the Church, the Sunday Eucharist is a special expression of *the Church's faith in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ*. It is by virtue of the Holy Spirit that the Church calls the faithful together to proclaim their faith in this mystery, as well as in the mystery of their "birth unto hope which draws its life from the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (*1 Petr.* 1, 13). The liturgical assembly built up around the Eucharist has always been, from its apostolic

origin, the special mark of the Church's celebration of the Lord's Day, and the Second Vatican Council has reiterated the importance of Sunday Mass (Cfr. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 106). It is in fact the whole Paschal Mystery that the People of God are called to celebrate and to participate in each Sunday: the passion and the glorification of the Lord Jesus.

3. *The vitality of the Church* depends to a great extent on the Sunday Eucharistic celebration, in which *the mystery of salvation* is made present to God's people and enters into their lives. In the expression of *Lumen Gentium*, God wills to save and sanctify us as a people (Cfr. *Lumen Gentium*, 9), and there is no moment in which we are more intimately united as a community than during Sunday Mass.

It is at this moment that the *Eucharist builds the Church* and is, at one and the same time, the "sign of community and the cause of its growth"- as you yourselves pointed out some time ago in your pastoral message "To Teach as Jesus Did" (*To Teach as Jesus Did*, 24).

The *whole life of the ecclesial community* is linked to the Sunday Eucharist. It is here that Jesus Christ prays with his people, who become with him a people of worship, adoring the Father "in spirit and in truth" (*Io.* 4, 23). *The aspect of worship is central to an understanding of the full dignity of the People of God.* Jesus Christ presents his brothers and sisters to his Father as a worshipping people, a liturgical community. And in this role they fulfil the purpose of all liturgy, which the Second Vatican Council powerfully describes as being "above all the worship of the divine majesty" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 33).

I am convinced, venerable and dear brothers, that we can render a great pastoral service to the people by emphasizing their liturgical dignity, and by directing their thoughts to the purposes of worship. When our people, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, realize that they are called to be "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation" (*1 Petr.* 2, 9), and that they are called to adore and thank the Father in union with Jesus Christ, *an immense power is unleashed* in their Christian lives. When they realize that they actually have a Sacrifice of praise and expiation to offer together with Jesus Christ, when they realize that all their prayers of petition are united to an infinite act of the praying Christ, then there is fresh hope and new encouragement for the Christian people. Young people have shown themselves particularly sensitive to this truth.

4. Essential to the whole liturgical renewal of this century, and confirmed by its experience, is the principle that the *full and active participation* by all the people in the liturgy is the "primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 14). And from our own experiences yours and mine - we know how much our people are capable of doing, how great their Christian contribution to the world is, when the Lord Jesus touches their lives, when they themselves enter into his Sacrifice. Let us continue, dear brothers, to strengthen the understanding of the faithful and their appreciation of their role in Eucharistic worship. And let us continue to work to bring about that full and active participation, which the

Church wills for everyone, but always according to the differing roles of the various members of the one Body of Christ.

5. In these differing roles of Eucharistic participation the unity of the whole Body is ensured, and the dignity of each one respected. For the laity it is a question of *actuating the call to worship inherent in their Baptism and Confirmation*. For priests, it is also a question of performing the irreplaceable service of making Christ's Sacrifice present in the Church. For all the members of the Church, the Eucharist, and especially the Sunday Eucharist, is the source and summit of all Christian living. All the activities of our people - all their efforts to live the Gospel, to bear witness to Christ, to put his word into practice in their family life and in society - all of these efforts are ennobled and supported by the power of the Eucharist, in particular at the Sunday celebration.

All the striving of the laity *to consecrate the secular held of activity to God* finds inspiration and magnificent confirmation in the Eucharistic Sacrifice. Participating in the Eucharist is only a small portion of the laity's week, but the total effectiveness of their lives and all Christian renewal depends on it: the primary and indispensable source of the true Christian spirit!

6. In promoting the participation of the faithful in the Liturgy of the Word and of the Eucharist, we are rendering *an eminently pastoral service* and contributing to so many aspects of the Church's life: marriage and the family are fortified; evangelization is fostered; human rights find their confirmation in the liberating message of Jesus, which is fully proclaimed in the sacramental renewal of the Paschal Mystery. Through the proclamation of God's word, zeal for catechesis is nurtured in the Christian people; vocations are offered by Christ; and light and strength are given to the faithful to meet human problems, even the most vexing and difficult ones. And all of this spells out the relevance of the Eucharistic mystery and its celebration for God's people. All of this confirms the importance of the Sunday liturgy in the life of the community.

7. It is also extremely useful to recall that the Second Vatican Council, in its treatment of Christian education, emphasizes as one of the purposes of Christian education: "that the baptized may learn to adore God the Father in spirit and in truth" (*Gravissimum Educationis*, 2). *Education*, too, like other Christian activity, *is oriented to the worship of God*.

8. I wish at this time to support you in all your efforts to help the faithful celebrate worthily their Christian dignity in the Sunday liturgy. May the People of God in America be led to an ever greater conviction of *the sacredness of the Lord's Day*. Despite changes in society and different types of pressures, as well as various difficulties, may they continue to the full extent of their power to maintain that great tradition fostered in your land of sanctifying Sunday and the Holidays of Obligation. May each of the faithful realize the privilege that is his or hers to be part of the praying Church: to be able to say to God: "By your gift I will utter praise in the vast assembly" (*Ps. 22, 26*).

Besides the Eucharistic liturgy, the other aspects of the Sunday celebration - the Liturgy of the

Hours, rest and freedom from work, the performance of charitable works and the broadcasting of religious radio and television programs where possible - contribute to the Christian dimension of society and help lift up people's hearts to God the Creator and Redeemer of all.

Dear brothers, be assured that, in the charity of Christ, I am close to you and to all your brothers in the priesthood, who share with you the pastoral service of making God's people *ever more conscious of their dignity as a people of worship*.

United with each other, and with the other bishops in America, and together with the universal Church, let us work with all our energy to encourage our people in their generous efforts to maintain unaltered the apostolic tradition of participating in the Sunday Eucharist. There are many other considerations that could complete these reflections. Let us, however, as pastors united with our people, proclaim without ceasing *the faith of the Church* that is the basis of every Sunday Eucharist: the Resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ from the dead. It is he whom we await in joyful hope; and it is in the name of the Risen Jesus that all our episcopal, pastoral and collegial ministry is exercised. Praised be Jesus Christ!

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