



The Holy See

**APOSTOLIC PILGRIMAGE TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA GREETING TO THE FAITHFUL IN THE
ARCHDIOCESE OF MIAMI ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II** *Cathedral of Saint Mary (Miami)*

Thursday, 10 September 1987

Dear Archbishop McCarthy and my other Brother Bishops,

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Dear Friends,

1. It is a great joy for me to begin my pastoral visit here in Miami, in this Cathedral of Saint Mary. This Church represents a long history of faith and dedicated Christian life and witness on the part of countless clergy, religious and laity in this city and in the State of Florida.

In coming among you, I wish to commend you for the Jubilee Year of Reconciliation that you have observed in preparation for my visit, and for the Archdiocesan Synod that you are holding. These events are meant to be of lasting spiritual value for all of you of the archdiocese, so that your Christian witness in everyday life may be ever more fruitful in the society of which you are a part. I also commend you for meeting the challenges of a rapidly expanding local Church. Over the years, you have welcomed hundreds of thousands of refugees, of different languages and cultures, fleeing religious or political oppression. You have struggled along with them and for them to build a united community in Christ. I urge all of you—the clergy, religious and laity of Miami, in communion with your archbishop and with me—to continue seeking ways to deepen our ecclesial unity in the one Body of Christ. This unity is expressed in many ways. It is unity in preaching the Gospel, professing the Creed, celebrating the liturgy and participating in the sacraments, especially the Holy Eucharist. It is unity in going forward as a missionary Church to evangelize the world. But our very presence in this house of God reminds us of another source of unity. I am referring to the personal prayer of each and every one of us, whether offered here in a moment of silence or amid the many settings in which our daily life unfolds. "The spiritual life", as the Second Vatican Council reminds us, "is not confined to participation in the liturgy. The Christian is certainly called to pray with others, but he must also enter into his room to pray to the Father in secret; indeed, according to the teaching of the Apostle Paul, he should pray without ceasing".

2. People always have a great interest in prayer. Like the Apostles, they want to know how to pray.

The response that Jesus gives is one known to all of us: it is the "Our Father", in which he reveals in a few simple words all the essentials of prayer. The focus IS not primarily on ourselves, but on the heavenly Father to whom we commit our lives in faith and trust. Our first concern must be his name, his kingdom, his will. Only then do we ask for our daily bread, for forgiveness, and for deliverance from trials yet to come. The "Our Father" teaches us that our relationship to God is one of dependence. We are his adopted sons and daughters through Christ. All that we are and all that we have comes from him and is destined to return to him. The "Our Father" also presents prayer to us as an expression of our desires. Beset as we are by human weakness, we naturally ask God for many things. Many times we may be tempted to think that he does not hear or answer us. But as Saint Augustine wisely reminds us, God already knows what we desire even before we ask. He says that prayer is for our benefit, because in praying we "exercise" our desires so that we will grasp what God is preparing to give us. It is an opportunity for us to "widen our hearts". In other words, God is always listening to us and answering us—but from the perspective of a love far greater and a knowledge far deeper than our own. When it appears that he is not fulfilling our desires by granting the things we ask, however unselfish and noble they may be, in reality he is purifying those desires of ours for the sake of a higher good that often surpasses our understanding in this life. The challenge is to "widen our hearts" by hallowing his name, by seeking his Kingdom, and by accepting his will. Like Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane we may sometimes pray either for ourselves or others, " Father, you have the power to do all things. Take this cup away!". But also like Christ we must add, "Not my will but your will be done". The act of praying is also meant to open us up to God and our neighbour, not only in words but also in action. That is why Christian spirituality, following Jesus himself, associates prayer with fasting and almsgiving. A life of self-denial and charity is a sign of conversion to God's way of thinking, to his way of love. By humbling ourselves through penance, we open ourselves to God. By giving in charity, over and above the demands of justice, we open ourselves to our neighbour. Saint Peter Chrysologus gives witness to this tradition when he says: "Prayer, fasting, and mercy... give life to one another. What prayer knocks for upon a door, fasting successfully begs and mercy receives. For fasting is the soul of prayer; and mercy is the life of fasting... Fasting does not germinate unless watered by mercy".

3. Dear brothers and sisters: we must never underestimate the power of prayer to further the Church's redemptive mission and to bring good where there is evil. As I mentioned earlier, we must be united in prayer. We pray not just for ourselves and our loved ones, but also for the needs of the universal Church and of all mankind: for the missions and for priestly and religious vocations, for the conversion of sinners and the salvation of all, for the sick and the dying. As members of the Communion of Saints, our prayer also embraces the souls of those in Purgatory who, in the loving mercy of God, can still find after death the purification they need to enter into the happiness of heaven. Prayer also makes us realize that sometimes our own troubles and desires are small compared to the needs and to the suffering of so many of our brothers and sisters throughout the world. There is the spiritual suffering of those who have lost their way in life because of sin or a lack of faith in God. There is the material suffering of millions of people who lack food, clothing, shelter, medicine, and education; of those who are deprived of the most fundamental human rights; of those who are exiles or refugees because of war and oppression. I

know that Miami is no stranger to this kind of suffering. We must act to alleviate it, but we must also pray not only for those who suffer, but also for those who inflict suffering.

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