



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC PILGRIMAGE
TO NORWAY, ICELAND, FINLAND,
DENMARK AND SWEDEN

**MEETING WITH THE PRIESTS, THE RELIGIOUS SISTERS
AND REPRESENTATIVES OF THE LAITY**

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Pro-Cathedral of Saint Olav, Oslo
Friday, 2 June 1989

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

1. It is a great joy for me to see assembled here in the Pro-Cathedral of Saint Olav *the priests of the diocese, the religious sisters and representatives of the laity*. In you I embrace the whole Diocese of Oslo, gathered around your Pastor, Bishop Gerhard Schwenzer, and I greet you all with the words of Saint Paul: "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (*Phil.* 1, 2).

The cathedral is always the heart of the diocese. It is the centre from which radiates the glow of Christian life, manifested *in faith - filled worship of the Lord and in lives of holiness and service*. So it is fitting that it is precisely here that the Successor of Peter should be called upon to strengthen his brothers and sisters (Cfr. *Luc.* 22, 32) and encourage them to persevere in the sacramental life, in evangelization and catechesis, and in all forms of Christian service. Peter's profession of faith at Caesarea Philippi stands at the heart of the *ministerium petrinum*. Today and for ever the Bishop of Rome is bound by those simple and clear words spoken by Peter who answered Jesus' question: "Who do you say that I am?" with the words "*You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God*" (*Matth.* 16, 16). This is the faith which I share with you and which I reaffirm here today before the priests, religious and lay people of Oslo.

2. In the first place I greet *the priests* who labour in the Lord's vineyard in this diocese. My wish is

to encourage you in your ministry. You have been “*set apart for the Gospel of God*” (Rom. 1, 1). Nothing in your lives can take the place of your special relationship with Christ, your sacramental configuration to him and your sharing in his Paschal Mystery. *For you are really witnesses to and ministers of a life other than this earthly one.* You are the spokesmen, the special builders of the Kingdom won by Christ through his victory over sin and death. As “heralds of the Gospel and shepherds of the Church”, you have the special task of caring for the spiritual growth of the Body of Christ (Cfr. *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 6).

My prayer for you is that you will be ever more authentic witnesses to Christ, with a deep life of prayer, faithful in the celebration of the sacraments by which the Church is built up, tireless in teaching. You have to work in the difficult conditions of the *diaspora* where distance and climate often make it difficult for the parishioners to come together, and difficult for you to reach them. Never be disheartened or dismayed by the small numbers of your flocks. Remember that you are always linked by unbreakable bonds with the whole Church both on earth and in heaven. *Jesus Christ has chosen you and he loves you.* He will keep you faithful to the end! His grace will uphold you in your generous service of his Church!

3. Dear Sisters,

In you I pay tribute to *a long history of devoted consecration* and witness to Christ in the diocese. The Church’s presence in Norway, both in the last century and in our own, would not have been possible without you. Many Norwegians have had their first contact with the Catholic Church through your hospitals, schools and kindergartens. They have seen in your generous service Christ the servant, healer and teacher.

The evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience for the sake of the Kingdom are the expression of *the supreme love of God*: God’s love for you, which is at the origin of your vocation, and your love for him, which is a clear sign to the rest of the community of “a new and eternal life acquired by the redemption of Christ” (*Lumen Gentium*, 44). This means that your place as consecrated women is *at the very heart of the Church*. In you, your fellow Catholics and all others should see the essence of what baptismal life means. *What you do* as consecrated persons has great importance, but *what you are* through your religious consecration is even more central to the mystery of God’s saving presence in human affairs. Thus, whatever the form your individual religious families take – contemplative or apostolic – *your consecrated life is an immensely powerful witness to Christ’s love.*

Dear Sisters: you know how much the Catholic community in Norway needs you. The Pope encourages you and the ecclesial community is grateful to you. May God’s grace uphold you and fill you with joy!

4. I greet the *representatives of the laity* who are here and also the many lay people whom they

represent.

Dear friends: in the midst of society it is your special task to be witnesses to Christ and to bring your Christian faith to bear on the realities of family, social and working life, *so that all things may be made new in Christ* (Cfr. 2Cor. 5, 17). To be a Christian is to bring a “newness” to life and to the world around us. This responsibility is rooted in our baptism, in which each one of us has shared in the death of Christ. The words of Saint Paul describe what has happened to each one of us: “We were buried with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father we too might walk in newness of life” (*Rom.* 6, 4).

Today, the pressure brought to bear on people, young and old alike, to conform to the values of the secular society in which they live is great. But Saint Paul tells Christians: “Do not be conformed to this world, but *be transformed by the renewal of your mind*” (*Ibid.* 12, 2). This “renewal” has taken place once and for all in the waters of baptism, but it must become a reality that takes an ever deeper hold of our lives, “transforming” us so that our thoughts and values are the thoughts and values of Jesus Christ himself.

How is this to happen? The sacraments of the Church, *especially the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Penance*, conform our lives more and more closely to Christ’s, so that we do indeed live in a way “worthy of the gospel of Christ” (*Phil.* 1, 27). *By coming together with others to pray and to serve* the Church and the civil community – working among refugees and immigrants, in your parish councils, caring for the needy, belonging to the Fellowship of Young Catholics, the Association of Catholic Women and the other councils and organizations that render such valuable service in this diocese – in all these ways you experience the Church as a community, indeed a *communion*, like a great symphony of worship, prayer and service.

5. Dear brothers and sisters: in this great symphony each person has a specific place and role. Each one of us – priest, religious and lay person – is called to play a particular “instrument”, and all together we are called to active and harmonious participation. Thus for example *parish worship on Sundays*, wherever your *diaspora* conditions make it possible, should be a joyous gathering of the whole community. *Prayer in families and in small groups* – especially when the distance to the Mass centre is very great – can also help to safeguard the community dimension of faith, for faith cannot and must not be confined to the personal and individual domain.

In worship and service everybody is called *to work together*: “As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace” (*1Petr.* 4, 10). Pastoral ministry and service in the Church must bear the marks of unity and harmony. In the well-known words of the Council, the Church is the “sacrament or sign of intimate union with God and of the unity of the whole human race” (*Lumen Gentium*, 1). Living this unity and harmony can sometimes be hard; sometimes we have to give up our own ideas for the sake of broader and higher perspectives, and this can cause suffering. But this too is a form of *conformity to Christ*, who came not to do his own

will but the will of the Father who sent him (cf. *Jn* 6:38).

6. Our calling is not to bear witness to any merely human doctrine (*1Cor.* 2, 1), but to bear witness to *Jesus Christ and the power of his Resurrection* (Cfr. *Phil.* 3, 10). This has been the constant task of the Church in Norway, from the earliest days of her presence here. Sometimes it has been the witness of blood, as with Saint Olav and with Saint Hallvard, the Patron Saint of Oslo, who gave his life in defence of the weak. For all of us here in this cathedral today, the task is the same: to point beyond ourselves, to point to Jesus Christ, who is our hope and our life, who alone can answer the questions and satisfy the longings of human hearts, Jesus Christ *who alone is "the Way, and the Truth, and the Life"* (*Io.* 14, 6).

Dear brother priests, religious sisters and lay men and women: "I thank God... when I remember you constantly in my prayers" (*2Tim.* 1, 3).

I thank you, and those whom you represent, for the witness of your Catholic faith. I encourage you to go on, with joy and confidence, in the love and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ. *Norway needs a new confidence in its Christian calling.* It needs to look to Jesus Christ, the Redeemer, for light and strength to meet the needs of a society which has made great material progress but which is sometimes unsure of how to answer the demands of the spirit. Such a renewal of faith depends greatly on each one of you.

May Mary, the Mother of Jesus and the Mother of his Church, support you with her prayers, and may all the Saints of Norway strengthen you.

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