



The Holy See

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

MEETING WITH THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY OF ICELAND

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Cathedral of Christ the King, Reykjavik
Saturday, 3 June 1989

Dear Bishop Jolson,
My Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

1. As I begin my pastoral visit to Iceland I make my own the words of Saint Paul: “*Grace to you and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*” (2Thess. 1, 2). I greet my brother in the episcopate, Bishop Jolson, and the priests, the religious and the lay people who are gathered here. I thank you for your presence and for your warm welcome.

Iceland has enjoyed a long Christian tradition. The roots of the Catholic Church go back to the year one thousand, when the Legislative Assembly (Althing) accepted Christianity. Even before that memorable date, the seeds of “new life” had already been sown thanks to the courageous efforts of the earliest settlers. Down to our own day, the Catholic faith in Iceland has been lived with *perseverance*, with *an ecclesial spirit* which is not easily dampened. Even though you are small in numbers, you provide a powerful witness of faithful perseverance, an indomitable will and a steadfastness which comes from knowing Christ.

2. I would now like to speak directly to *my brothers in the priesthood*. I wish to affirm straightaway that your ministry of word and sacrament is indispensable for the Christian life of God’s people in Iceland. As men who love Christ and keep his word, you can be confident that he and the Father have come to you and made their home with you (Cfr. *Io.* 14, 23). You in turn must abide in Christ through personal holiness rooted in an ever deeper spiritual life. Since you act in *persona Christi*

when you celebrate the Eucharist and the other sacraments, you will want to make him the centre of your priesthood, of all that you are and do. With Saint Paul you must say “it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me” (*Gal. 2, 20*).

Today’s cultural and social environment also requires a deep *doctrinal formation* on the part of all priests. This is essential if you are to be effective teachers of Christian doctrine in collaboration with your bishop. Continuing formation ensures that you will be able to present the Church’s faith in all its fullness, “in season and out of season”, in response to the many questions of our day. It will also help you to deepen your understanding and love of the priesthood. Through serious study you will be challenged to seek the light, to grow in your knowledge of the mysteries of faith and to pray for the wisdom that can only come from the Holy Spirit.

Finally, I ask you *to encourage and pray for vocations* to the priesthood in Iceland. Young men will respond generously to this noble call when they are inspired by your faith, your commitment and your perseverance. They will respond to the challenge of the priesthood when they see Christ in holy and faithful priests. Do not be afraid to invite – to call by name – generous young men to give their lives in service to the Lord. Let them see by the example of your own priestly lives what a joy it is to be Christ’s priest in Iceland today.

3. I also wish to address *the women religious* who are present: your lives are a sign to all people, even to those who do not believe in God, that you have dedicated yourselves to something special. For people of faith, your profession of chastity, poverty and obedience is a gift which Christ has made to his Church. Within the entire People of God, you have been called to a *particular consecration*, one which is “rooted in that of Baptism and is a fuller expression of it” (Cfr. *Perfectae Caritatis*, 5). By responding to God’s call with a profound and free surrendering of self, you invite a response on the part of others to the Kingdom of God, already present in our midst. By God’s grace, you can show what it means to make a *total gift of oneself* as Jesus did to the Father.

From the beginning of the Church’s life in Iceland, consecrated men and women have made an important contribution to the *human and Christian development of the nation*. At one point in history there were nine monasteries of the Benedictine and Augustinian Orders in Iceland and two convents of Benedictine Sisters. Many of the masterpieces of Icelandic literature were created during that time, thus linking the *cultural and artistic patrimony* of this land to the monastic presence. This outpouring of the Spirit was also manifested in the *care of children, the sick and the elderly*, a tradition that is continued today by the Sisters of Saint Joseph, the Franciscan Missionary Sisters of Mary, the Carmelite Sisters and the Sisters of Mercy who devote themselves to the care of the sick and the education of children.

Heute möchte ich meine aufrichtige Dankbarkeit den *Sankt-Josefsschwestern* bekunden, die ihr Apostolat auf dieser Insel mit der Gründung eines Pflegeheimes für Kranke begonnen haben;

zuerst für die Fischer in Faskruösfjörður. Dann errichteten sie das erste Hospital Islands.

Durch Euch, liebe Schwestern, haben viele Menschen zum Glauben an Gott gefunden; durch Eure liebende Sorge sind verhärtete Herzen umgewandelt worden. Auch nach Eurem Ausscheiden aus dem aktiven Dienst setzt Ihr Euer apostolisches Wirken durch Gebet und Opfer fort. Ich grüße Euch alle von Herzen: Euch, die Ihr hier anwesend seid, aber auch Euch, die Ihr krank seid. Von Herzen versichere ich Euch meines beständigen Gebets mit meinem besonderen Apostolischen Segen.

J'adresse un salut cordial aux *Sœurs Franciscaines Missionnaires de Marie*, qui se dévouent si généreusement au soin des malades et à l'instruction des enfants. Au nom de l'Eglise, je vous remercie de votre présence à Stykkisholmur, Reykjavik et maintenant Hafnarfjörður! *Vous avez en héritage la joie de saint François!* Il ne connaissait pas de plus grand bonheur que de se dévouer à ceux qui sont pauvres matériellement ou spirituellement. En approfondissant votre charisme franciscain, vous serez en mesure de toucher ceux qui, malgré l'abondance des biens de ce monde, demeurent angoissés et insatisfaits. Par votre vie consacrée et par les services que vous rendez, vous guidez votre prochain vers le Christ, source de vie et source de joie, d'une joie que nul ne peut ravir (Cfr. *Io. 16, 22*).

Wam, drogie Siostry Karmelitanki, dziękuję serdecznie za wasze modlitwy, poświęcenie i ofiarną pracę. Poprzez milczenie uważne wsłuchanie się w słowo Boże i szczególne nabożeństwo do Eucharystii, stajecie się narzędziami zbawienia, jak Maryja zjednoczona ze swym Boskim Synem. Dajecie wymowne świadectwo życiu oddanemu samotności, modlitwie i pokucie. Jako zakonnice kontemplacyjne zajmujecie uprzywilejowane miejsce w życiu Kościoła. Modlę się gorąco o to, aby wielu młodych ludzi dostrzegło w waszym życiu tę radość, która jest owocem zupełnego oddania się Chrystusowi.

4. Finally, I wish to say a special word to all the *lay people* who are present. As I mentioned earlier, *perseverance is the sign of Icelandic life and faith!* The farmer and the fisherman struggle against the forces of nature and at times have to overcome great obstacles. We are on the eve of a day honouring the seamen of Iceland and their families – all of whom understand the meaning of courage and perseverance.

Perseverance and fidelity on the part of all is much needed in order to fulfil the Church's mission. There is the perennial challenge of *building up the community of believers*, and of handing on the faith to young people, especially by good example as authentic followers of Christ. There is the challenge of upholding *moral life* in accordance with the Gospel. Icelandic Catholics are called to make a *positive Christian contribution* to society as did their ancestors before them. Like your national hero, Bishop Jon Arason, you are called to *build on your Catholic identity* and to reflect your obedience to Christ in all that you say and do.

In this great task you who are the lay faithful of Iceland – parents, single people and children – have an essential role to play. The recent Post-Synodal Exhortation spoke at length on your dignity as laity and the fruitfulness of your vocation (Cfr. *Christifideles Laici*, 5). Among other things, it pointed out that the distinctive feature of the lay state of life is its *secular character*. Your calling bears witness within the Church to the significance of earthly temporal realities in the salvific plan of God (*Ibid.* 55).

The concerns of *marriage, family, work and home* – the responsibilities of *social, political, cultural and economic life*: none of those are foreign to the call to holiness that you have received from God. Nor are these realities alien to your participation in the Church's mission. The challenge for all of us is to *renew the life of society with the Gospel*. The task of *re-evangelization* summons each of us to a deeper love and knowledge of our faith and a stronger commitment to bring it to others: "Everyone is called to grow continually in intimate union with Jesus Christ, in conformity to the Father's will, in devotion to others, in charity and justice" (*Ibid.* 60).

I wish also to say a special word of greeting to the *young people present who will soon receive the Sacrament of Confirmation!* Dear young people: Confirmation will bind you more closely to Christ and the Church. You will be strengthened with the gifts of the Holy Spirit, in order to bear the witness of faith to others in the community, especially to your own generation. Remember, Christ calls you to be his friends, and the Church needs each of you to carry the Good News of salvation to others.

5. My dear friends: priests, sisters and lay people, I appeal to all Catholics in Iceland and to all Christian believers to cooperate in making the gospel message of Jesus Christ *the soul of your nation*: its inspiration and strength, its light and its measure. In this way God will be glorified and all the citizens of Iceland will satisfy their deepest longings for what is true and good, for what is worthy of man's life and eternal calling.

The challenge of Christian living is demanding, but we know by faith that "*with God nothing will be impossible*" (*Luc.* 1, 37). Christ's grace and love will not be lacking. Never lose courage, for it is precisely in your weakness that God's power will be manifested (cfr. *2Cor.* 12, 9). Through his Spirit you will be able to say: "*when I am weak, then I am strong*" (*Ibid.* 12, 10). When you feel the burdens of the day or of the years, know that Christ is there to support you with the grace of your Christian calling.

To all of you who proclaim Christ's Gospel by your perseverance in faith, hope and love I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.

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