



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT
OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO BOLOGNA, ON THE OCCASION OF THE
23rd ITALIAN NATIONAL EUCHARISTIC CONGRESS
(SEPTEMBER 27-28, 1997)

WELCOME CEREMONY

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE JOHN PAUL II

*Piazza Maggiore
Saturday, 27 September 1997*

1. In this beautiful, ancient square, the *Piazza Maggiore*, I cordially greet all of you who have come to meet me: you who are taking part in the National Eucharistic Congress, you, the Church of Bologna's faithful, and you, her citizens!

I greet in particular Cardinal Giacomo Biffi, Archbishop of the city, as well as the Prime Minister and the Mayor of Bologna; to each of them I express my warmest thanks for their sincere and friendly words of welcome. Their presence here expresses, for different but converging reasons, the soul of a city and a nation whose histories are irrevocably interwoven with the Gospel.

I am grateful to Cardinal Camillo Ruini, whom I cordially greet, for having represented me here as my Legate from the start of the closing celebrations of the National Eucharistic Congress.

Lastly, I extend my greetings to my confrères, the Cardinals and Bishops who have come from every part of the nation, to the regional authorities, to the mayors of the towns in this Archdiocese of Bologna and of so many Italian cities, to the other religious, civil and military authorities — national and local — who have wished to honour this occasion with their presence; to them go my

respectful thoughts and strong encouragement to persevere generously in their respective tasks, exercising the responsibilities entrusted to them for pursuing the common good.

2. At this time I must also address an affectionate thought to the dear peoples of Umbria and the Marches who yesterday were stricken several times by a serious earthquake that caused incalculable damage to people and property. I express sincere condolences for the victims and heartfelt sympathy for their families' grief. I am spiritually close to all who have been left homeless and to those who have suffered and are anxious. The extensive damage to the artistic and religious patrimony, especially to the Upper Basilica of St Francis, to the Sacred Convent of Assisi and to other monuments and churches in various localities devastated by the earthquake is also a reason for sorrow.

As I entrust the souls of the deceased to the divine mercy, I ask the Lord to comfort their relatives, to encourage the injured and to support everyone who has been harmed by the earthquake. May this time of suffering and trial be alleviated by the Lord's grace and the solidarity of so many generous persons who, with the effective co-ordination of the public authorities, are making every effort to aid their brothers and sisters in need.

3. I am delighted to be in Bologna *for the third time*. With a heart grateful to divine Providence, which has given me this opportunity, I recall my two previous visits: the first in 1982 for the "Pastoral Visit" to the Church in Bologna, then led by the late Cardinal Archbishop Antonio Poma; the second in 1988 when, responding to an invitation from the rector of the university, I came to celebrate the ninth centenary of this illustrious institution's foundation.

On those occasions I could observe the lasting fidelity to the Gospel of the Christian community living in this land and I could encourage it in the great task which, on the threshold of the new millennium, engages the ancient Churches of the Christian West born in a special way from the first evangelization: *the task of a new evangelization* able to imbue behaviour, culture and all life with the Gospel spirit.

My third pilgrimage was prepared in spirit by the first two and in some ways completes them. I have come to enrol a son of your people among the ranks of the blessed: Ven. Fr Bartholomew Mary Dal Monte. I came above all to preside at the conclusion of the National Eucharistic Congress, a privileged stage in the preparations for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000; a preparation which therefore begins with reflection on *Jesus Christ, the one Saviour of the world: yesterday, today, and for ever*.

4. It is he who is the beginning, the object and the goal of all evangelization. Thus we must look to him with ever renewed faith and hope, especially in this Italian land evangelized so long ago and today marked by so many social and spiritual challenges.

The twofold occasion of this visit leads me to entrust a twofold message to you all, the faithful and people of goodwill, especially those of you who are responsible for the public welfare. First of all the message concerning *the Eucharist*: "summit and epitome of divine generosity", as was said in the doctrinal document for the Congress, the Eucharistic sacrament is God's true gift to each heart that opens itself in faith to the Gospel message. By sharing in the one Eucharistic Bread, believers are given the opportunity to open themselves to communion with their brothers and sisters. The Eucharist thus becomes a source of fruitful order and peaceful cooperation in every human society.

The second message is that of holiness: with the reverberation of its human riches, holiness is anything but useless to society. A people who wanted to confine within church walls this daily "gift of God" (cf. Jn 4:10) would certainly be all the poorer. This is proved by the shining examples which have come from the human response to God's initiative in the course of time. The history of your Church in Bologna can offer numerous testimonies in this regard.

5. Today the National Eucharistic Congress, which has been going on here for about a week, focuses its attention *on the family*. Reflecting on the vocation to holiness which is proper to married couples, participants in the Congress have joined the young people in their vigil as they wait for tomorrow's great Eucharistic celebration.

The family is the "primordial human community". Was it not through a family that the Only-begotten Son of the Father entered into our history? This is why the family is always and everywhere *the way of the Church*. In a certain sense, it becomes more so wherever it is suffering internal crises or is subject to harmful cultural, social and economic influences which undermine its internal cohesion, if not actually preventing its formation.

This is why the Church considers *service to the family* one of her essential tasks. She never tires of asking that its primordial and connatural rights be recognized. At the same time, however, the Church continues to take responsibility for encouraging concrete assistance in the many situations of material and spiritual distress in which married couples are finding themselves, especially if they are young.

6. Dear parents who have come here from every region of Italy, I address my most cordial greetings to each one of you. You have come with your children *to adore Jesus Christ* in the sacrament of the Eucharist. You love to honour him, calling him by the name of *Bridegroom of the Church, his Bride*.

I know your generosity, your commitment and your patience in the difficulties and labours you must face every day. Do not be afraid! You have opened the door of your house to Christ, indeed, you have wished to build your home on the rock of his Word. Christ will save your families from every threat of the evil one.

You have at heart to transmit your beliefs and hopes to the new generations, guiding their growth so that they will become mature people who can spend their lives for their brothers and sisters, making their own existence a sincere gift to their neighbour. Thus they will be artisans of that "family humanism" which Italian society so urgently needs.

In this context, I also greet the members of the Pro-Life Movement, who I know are present in large numbers on this day dedicated to the family. As I cordially thank everyone who has generously worked for the successful outcome of this great Eucharistic Congress, I invoke the constant protection of God and of the Madonna of St Luke upon the people of Bologna and on those who guide their destiny.

At the end of his address the Holy Father led the recitation of the Angelus and then spoke extemporaneously.

Thank you again for this invitation and for welcoming me a third time. A Latin proverb says: "Omne trinum est perfectum".
