



The Holy See

SPEECH OF THE HOLY FATHER TO THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE PASTORAL CARE OF MIGRANTS AND ITINERANT PEOPLE

25 June 1999

*Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,
Dear Brothers and Sisters!*

1. It is a joy for me to welcome you at the end of the sessions of the Plenary Meeting of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People. I greet you all with affection and, as I thank you for your visit, I wish to express profound appreciation for your commitment in the service of the Holy See. I am particularly grateful to Archbishop Stephen Fumio Hamao, President of this Pontifical Council, for the courteous words that he addressed to me in your behalf.

During these days, you reflected on the role of pilgrimages to shrines in the life of the Church. These places of prayer, as I already stressed elsewhere, are “milestones that guide the journey of the children of God on earth” (*Homily to the faithful in Corrientes, Argentina, 9 April 1987: Insegnamenti, X, 1 [1987], 1188*). Looking at their rich reality, it is easy to see that they represent a great gift of God to his Church and to the whole of humankind.

1. The human person longs to meet God and pilgrimages make him accustomed to thinking of the port where he could land in the course of his religious search. There, the faithful can sing with the Psalmist his thirst and hunger for the Lord: “God you are my God, I am seeking you, my soul is thirsting for you, my flesh is longing for you, a land parched, weary and waterless; I long to gaze on you in the Sanctuary... Your love is better than life itself” (*Ps 63, 1-3*).

These “oases of the spirit” offer the ecclesial community a particularly favourable atmosphere for a meditation on the word of God and the celebration of the sacraments, especially Penance and the

Eucharist. Moreover, in these places it is possible to have a fruitful experience of faith, as well as manifest love for one's brothers and sisters through works of charity and service to the needy.

From this point of view, bishops in the different parts of the world have always promoted shrines as centres of deep spirituality in which the faithful, aside from reviving their own faith, become better aware of their duties in the social sphere and feel bound to give their concrete contribution so that the world may progressively be transformed into that kingdom of justice and peace indicated by the inspired words of Isaiah: "...The law will go out from Zion, and the oracle of Yahweh from Jerusalem... these will hammer their swords into ploughshares, their spears into sickles... They will do no hurt, no harm, on all my holy mountain, for the country is filled with the knowledge of Yahweh as the waters swell the sea (*Is* 2:3-4; 11:9).

If we examine things more closely, we would see that peace and solidarity among men and women pour out from reconciliation of the person with God. It is therefore necessary that in shrines, pilgrims find concrete possibilities for prayer and silence, to foster an encounter with God and the intimate experience of the tenderness of his love. This experience is particularly needed by migrants, refugees and displaced people, tried by painful and unjust situations. It is a need felt by seafarers, the personnel of Civil Aviation, nomads and circus people. From it, spiritual comfort is received by all those who, for various reasons, are far from their loved ones.

2. People come to shrines with different inner dispositions. Many of the faithful go there to live intense moments of contemplation and prayer, as well as profound spiritual renewal. Others go there now and then on the occasion of important events. Still others visit them only to find rest, because of cultural interest or simply out of curiosity. It is the task of the Ordinary of the place, in the case of diocesan shrines, and of the Episcopal Conference, in case of national shrines, to establish the appropriate pastoral norms so that every person's expectations would be given an adequate response. It is important to offer to everyone the merciful initiative of God who wants to communicate His very own life and the gift of salvation to his children. In shrines the words of Christ to the "least" and the "poorest" on earth are echoed: "Come to me, all you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest" (*Mt* 11:28).

And when there is a possibility of welcoming children and adolescents, this must impel those who are in charge of the pastoral care of shrines, in collaboration with the whole ecclesial community, to offer them an even more specialised service appropriate to their age.

3. Dear Brothers and Sisters, we are on our way towards the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. In the context of the Jubilee event, pilgrimages assume the value of an excellent sign of the journey that the Christian is called to undertake and the commitment with which he must celebrate the Jubilee (*cfr. Incarnationis Misterium*, 7). As I cordially thank each one of you for your commitment and pastoral solicitude shown by your daily activities, I entrust your efforts to the efficacious intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, venerated and invoked in many shrines that, in all parts of

the world, are witnesses of her maternal presence in the midst of Christ's disciples.

From a community and personal meeting with Mary, "Star of evangelization" (EN 82), pilgrims are encouraged to be, like Her, proclaimers of the "great works" that God keeps on realising in His Church. May Mary make her maternal presence felt in the midst of the People of God, which is getting ready to cross the threshold of the third millennium.

With these wishes, I gladly impart my Apostolic Blessing to all of you who are present here and your loved ones.