



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC PILGRIMAGE TO BANGLADESH, SINGAPORE, FIJI ISLANDS,
NEW ZEALAND, AUSTRALIA AND SEYCHELLES

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Melbourne (Australia), 28 November 1986

"I shall give you a new heart, and put a new spirit in you".

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. These words of God's promise which were spoken through the Prophet Ezekiel make us think of the words which Jesus of Nazareth spoke at the beginning of his messianic ministry:

"The Spirit of the Lord has been given to me . . .

He has sent me . . . to proclaim the Lord's year of favour".

Coming from God, Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit.

Precisely for this reason he was called the Christ, which means the Anointed One. He came in the power of the Holy Spirit, and he brought the Spirit with him. Jesus gave that Spirit to the Apostles.

He gave the Spirit to the Church. He gives the Spirit to all who are open to receive him. All of this was foreshadowed when God said: "I shall put a new spirit in you".

2. We are gathered here today in the power of Christ's messianic mission. We are united in the Holy Spirit. In this great City of Melbourne I greet you, Archbishop Little, and all of you who are gathered as the liturgical assembly of God's people in "the fellowship of the Holy Spirit".

This is not the first time that I have come to your country, and to this city. I have vivid memories of the strong faith shown by the people of Victoria at the Fortieth Eucharistic Congress here in

Melbourne in 1973. The host at that great event was Cardinal Knox, and I attended it as Archbishop of Krakow, a pilgrim of the Church in Poland to the Church in Australia. I gratefully recall his friendship and your hospitality.

At that time I heard people speak of the great leadership of Archbishop Mannix in this city from 1917 to 1963. The faith had first been brought here during the last century by the Irish immigrants, and the Archbishop's task was to lead his people to take their rightful place in this democracy. In those years the Church increased and multiplied, and the foundations were laid for the present lively traditions of lay initiative and activity, of Catholic education, and of generous dedication by the members of the Church to the progress and development of this State. It is only right that we should remember these outstanding churchmen and give thanks to God for their leadership.

3. Today I have the privilege of being here among you once more. This time I come as a pilgrim from Rome. I bring you the legacy of the See of Saint Peter, which is the servant Church of the whole human family and of all the particular Churches in Australia and throughout the world.

Yours is an immense and beautiful land: "An opal-hearted country, A wilful, lavish land", as your poet Dorothea Mackellar wrote, a sunburnt country "of sweeping plains and far horizons", but also a huge and mighty place of "fire and famine", "of droughts and flooding rains". You have met these challenges, and your present situation and your freedom show that you have built well.

Since the Second World War people from many nations have come here, and while they were seeking a better life for themselves and their families, they in turn have enriched the life and traditions of their adopted country. They came from Europe, and in particular from Italy, but also more recently from Asia and South America. They include many Catholics and these have contributed greatly to building up the Church in this land. Throughout this country and continent God's words spoken through the Prophet Ezekiel have taken on a particular eloquence: "Then I am going to take you from among the nations and gather you together from all the foreign countries, and bring you home . . . you will live in the land which I gave your ancestors. You shall be my people and I will be your God".

4. The Second Vatican Council tells us that "it has pleased God to make people holy and save them not merely as individuals without any mutual bonds, but by making them into a single people, a people which acknowledges him in truth and serves him in holiness". With these words the Council introduces a theme of the greatest importance for Christian faith and life. It is also a dominant theme of Sacred Scripture. With the new covenant in his blood, Christ institutes a new People of God. In this new people there is room for every nation, for each and every person. Its head is Christ, its heritage is the dignity and freedom of the children of God, its law is the new commandment to love as Christ loved us, its goal is the full revelation of the Kingdom of God, which is already present among us, but which will only be complete when "creation itself will be delivered from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God".

By the power of God's grace, this messianic people moves forward through history, not without trials and tribulations, seeking to build up the fellowship of life, charity and truth. Here at Flemington Racecourse in Melbourne, we gather as a part of the People of God to celebrate the Eucharist, and as we bear witness to the redemptive Sacrifice of Christ we give an account of the hope of eternal life that is in us.

5. Catholics of Victoria and all Australia, do you fully realize what it means to belong to the Church? Above all, do you draw sufficiently on the strength of the Holy Spirit, who sustains the Church in the truth and love of Christ, so that you can carry out the tasks of communicating this truth and this love to the world? Do you fully realise to use the words of Saint Peter - that you are "living stones making a spiritual house"? Yours is indeed a great dignity!

As the Successor of Peter, I have the task of encouraging the particular Churches to share ever more fully in the communion that is the universal Church, a communion with the Father through the Son and in the Holy Spirit, and a communion of the members among themselves. The second reading expresses the full force of our union in the one, holy, Catholic and apostolic Church: "together (we) are Christ's body". Australia is geographically far from Rome, but the bonds that unite us in the Church are much more than flesh and blood. Saint Paul tells us that "in the one Spirit we were all baptized". And it is the Holy Spirit who keeps us united in faith, hope and charity.

6. "Serve the Lord with gladness, Come before him singing for joy. Know that he, the Lord, is God. He made us, we belong to him". These words of the Psalm are addressed to the whole People of God. In Christ, they are addressed to each one of us: to every man, woman and child. They are an invitation to exercise the fundamental office of the priesthood of the faithful, which means to give glory to God and to acknowledge his dominion over all life.

7. The new People of God is a priestly people that has a share in the one priesthood of Christ: through baptism "he made us a line of kings and priests to serve his God and Father". We are a people of praise and worship, of holiness and spiritual rebirth. In brief, this common priesthood of all the baptized is expressed in two ways: on the one hand by worshipping and adoring God, and on the other by working to extend his Kingdom in the affairs of the human family. Both are part of our Christian vocation and should not be separated. The Sacrament of Confirmation helps us to share more fully in these tasks.

8. All the members of the Church, young and old, men and women, priests, religious and lay people have certain duties towards God. They are called to acknowledge his primacy in their lives through the Liturgy and through prayer. The sacraments, and especially the Eucharist, are bridges between the ordinary world and the Kingdom of God. They are the instruments of Christ's saving grace at work in our lives. They enable us to offer thanksgiving to God for all the good things that we possess; they help us to plead for our own needs and the needs of the human family. In this sense the tradition of Sunday Mass is of immense importance. God's people are called to

assemble for the celebration of the Lord's saving Death and Resurrection on the first day of the week, the day on which his Resurrection showed forth the Father's acceptance of our Redemption.

To those who have drifted away from the practice of the faith, I say this: listen to Christ and you will once more discover the meaning of his love. You will hear him calling you to return to his "Father's house". Perhaps you fear some lack of understanding on the part of the community. True, the Church is never perfect in all her members, but she is the Father's house. And it is only in the Father's house that you will be able to share fully in Christ's gifts of love and reconciliation.

9. Will the Christian community defend the gift of life from conception to the moment of death? It is not the quality of life - however important this may be - which makes life sacred, but the very fact of our existence. Life is a gift of God. Man is merely its administrator within the limits of the Creator's design. If the vulnerable and defenceless are not safe, no one is safe for long. No human rights are safe in a world without firm moral principles, in a world where everything is relative and depends merely on a particular opinion or point of view. God has given us our reason and his revealed teaching, in order to help us recognize these truths and defend fundamental values. If we explain them badly or ignore their consequences in public life, we will have betrayed our Christian heritage.

My visit is meant to be an invitation to the ecclesial community in Australia, and especially to the laity, to take a firm stand on the side of life and love, truth and justice, and the dignity of every human being. Ultimately I am asking you to take a stand for God! What I am saying is this: "Know that he, the Lord, is God. He made us, we belong to him". This is the great task of the priestly People of God.

10. I address my appeal in a particular way to the young, especially young adults. The future of any society rests with its young people. In fact the young are the most precious possession of any society, and a community is decadent when it does not want children, when it does not love them and respect them. Young people of Australia: I ask you: Does God have a part in your hopes and ambitions for the Australia of tomorrow? Do you dream of an Australia in which the poor and the downtrodden, the disadvantaged and the lonely, the spiritually blind and those struggling to make sense out of their lives will be sustained by the hands of a loving God? And do you realize that God has no other hands but yours to stretch out to those in need?

Are you willing to rise to Christ's challenge? It has different degrees. First he says: "If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments". When the young man in the Gospel freely asks what more he can do, Jesus answers: "If you wish to be perfect, go and sell what you own and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me".

The challenge which the Pope wants to place before the young people of Melbourne, of Victoria

and of Australia is the very same challenge which Christ addressed to that young man. Australia needs the witness of your Christian life. Australia needs young people who will live in charity and truth, who will live chaste lives and bear witness to God's plan for human love in marriage. Australia needs young people who will freely make the sacrifices necessary to follow Jesus more closely in the priesthood or in the religious life of consecrated chastity, poverty and obedience. In one way or another Christ will certainly speak to your hearts. In one form or another he will call you to sacrifice and service.

11. I have been told that Melbourne is a city of movements and ideas. It has been in the forefront of social programming, and more recently in the field of biotechnology. It is here, therefore, that I wish to stress that progress is only really progress when it respects the image of God in man, the God who has revealed himself in human history, and who has revealed that the ultimate meaning of human life - every human life - is union with himself, through our Lord Jesus Christ.

I would ask the men and women of science to make sure that they truly use their research and technical skill in the service of humanity, to make sure that these never become false idols. If science is ever separated from its moral and ethical demands, it can never lead humanity to a better life. Humanity has already had enough experience to know that such science can only destroy the very freedom and dignity of the human person which it was meant to serve.

Today we need to listen once more to God's promise made through the Prophet Ezekiel: "I shall cleanse you . . . of all your idols. I shall give you a new heart, and put a new spirit in you . . . You shall be my people and I will be your God".

Today we also need to be able to repeat the words of the Psalm: "Serve the Lord with gladness Yes, the Lord is good, his faithfulness is from age to age".

The Lord is good! He is our supreme good! The world too is good, the world that surrounds us, the world as it is built up through human civilization. It is good because it can lead us to God. But if the world draws man away from God, if it leads him away from his final destiny, it no longer serves its purpose, even if it appears to satisfy and to offer happiness. "God made us, we belong to him". Our task is to serve him with gladness.

12. This is my hope for all of you: a true renewal of spirit and life: for you, the bishops of Victoria; for the priests, deacons and seminarians, called to minister to God's people with all the love and concern of the Good Shepherd;

for you, men and women religious, who are privileged witnesses of God's love for his people;

for you, the laity of the Church in Victoria, called to build up Christ's Kingdom of justice, truth and love in this blessed land.

May Mary be the constant inspiration and model for you all.

Brothers and sisters of other Christian Communions, men and women of other religions and all people of good will: allow me to include you too in this prayer of hope and blessing.

May all of you, dear people of Australia, "serve the Lord with gladness"! Amen.

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