



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO AUSTRIA (JUNE 19-21, 1998)

EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION

HOMILY OF POPE JOHN PAUL II

*Cathedral of Saints Rupert and Virgilius, Salzburg
Friday, 19 June 1998*

"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want" (Ps 23 [22]:1).

1. Today we can address to the incarnate Word of God, our Shepherd, the words the psalmist uses to refer to the God of the Old Covenant: *"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want"*. We contemplate with gratitude the many fruits of faith which developed in this region like a mighty tree and made history: "Rejoice, Juvavum, because on the banks of your waters the Lord has planted trees which will never stop bearing fruit" (First Antiphon of the Office of Readings for the Feast of Sts Rupert and Virgilius).

Here the light of faith began to shine for the first time when the famous missionary, *Severinus*, reached this region. It was the end of the fifth century, when the ancient Roman provinces were already in decline. More than two centuries had to pass before another good shepherd, from the city of Worms on the Rhine, found the way leading to the small city on the Salzach River, most of which was in ruins: that itinerant Bishop was called *Rupert*. He built churches and spiritual centres. His first church was dedicated to the Apostle Peter.

In 739, *St Boniface*, as Papal Legate for Germany, created four Dioceses: Regensburg, Passau, Freising and Salzburg. The Pastors of these very ancient Churches are with us here today. I therefore extend a special greeting to Archbishop Georg Eder, who is our host, to Cardinal Friedrich Wetter of Munich and Freising, to Bishop Manfred Müller of Regensburg and to Bishop Franz Xaver Eder of Passau.

This Church of Salzburg is ancient and illustrious! As you know, after the holy Bishop *Virgilius*, who came from Ireland, had consecrated the first cathedral, it was elevated 1,200 years ago by Pope Leo III to a Metropolitan See.

The highlights of the past justly allow us today, on the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, to sing the *Te Deum*, praising the Lord our Good Shepherd, who carried Salzburg on his shoulders down the centuries: “*The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want*”.

2. Today, the day when the Successor of Peter is able to visit the “*German Rome*” for the second time, is not only dedicated to recalling a great past. It is intended to awaken in each person the commitment to *sincere renewal in faith* and a *generous concentration of his own energies* with those of other believers to promote the new evangelization.

As I say this, my gaze extends over the whole territory of the Salzburg region. I greet Mr Thomas Klestil, President of the Republic of Austria. I also extend a cordial welcome to the many Brothers in the episcopate and in the priesthood gathered here from Austria and neighbouring countries, as well as to Cardinal Christoph Schönborn, Archbishop of Vienna, and to the President of the Austrian Bishops' Conference, Bishop Johann Weber of Graz-Seckau.

In the light of our predecessors' missionary work, let us have a fresh awareness of the fact that the *faith cannot be confined to our churches*. We must take it into our community and into the larger world around us. *Missionary commitment* has a long tradition in this Episcopal see. As good Pastors, the Bishops of Salzburg went abroad to the East, bringing the Gospel message to Bohemia, Moravia and Hungary, and sent their co-workers as missionaries as far as Maribor on the Drava, to Bressanone, Leck and the Danube.

Today, from a geographical standpoint, the Mother Diocese has been somewhat reduced. But what Salzburg was in the past and must continue to be in the future remains engraved on the stones of this venerable cathedral and the ancient fortress: a *missionary centre* which radiates its influence beyond the boundaries of the Archdiocese and the country.

O Salzburg, *city built on a mountain*, be true to the salt in your name: may your inhabitants faithfully accept the salt of the Gospel and confirm it by their witness. Remember the legacy history has bequeathed to you: to spread the salt of the saving message through- out the surrounding region.

You, the *site of the “Primas Germaniae”*, have received a sort of missionary leadership from history: may your faithful always be aware of the responsibility such a privilege entails.

You have a mission to fulfil towards the men and women who seek the way that can lead them “to still waters”. May they meet, through the witness of your faithful, the One who can lead them on the right path “to lie down in green pastures” which can strengthen them (cf. Ps 23 [22]:2-3): “*The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want*”.

3. “*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil*” (Ps 23 [22]:4). We are aware of the dangers that lurk in deep and dark valleys. The geographical image concretely mirrors certain spiritual situations. Even the soul is exposed to treacherous chasms. We know the dark shadows of disappointment, disaster, doubts about the faith. Those who put their trust in God find protection and safety in the Good Shepherd's care: “*Your rod and your staff,*

they comfort me" (Ps 23 [22]:4).

Do not these words of Scripture allude to the teaching office that Christ entrusted to the Pastors of his Church? This office is not a human invention to exercise domination over souls. Christ himself has entrusted this task to us so that his divine word may be spoken by human lips and become a "rod and staff", guidance and support.

Dear brothers and sisters, moved by your awareness of the tasks connected to the office of the Successor of Peter, I came to you in Austria to bring you my word of advice and encouragement. I thank you for your presence, which testifies that you wish to belong to Christ. Like the Shepherd of the Gospel parable who carries the straying sheep on his shoulders, in the past months I have carried you in my heart with special affection.

The heart of the Shepherd of Rome beats for you all!

Do not abandon the flock of Christ, the Good Shepherd!

Do not leave the Church, but enter her — for the Good News that can illuminate even the darkness of our life: "*The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want*".

4. I want very much to express my esteem to everyone who works tirelessly to enliven the *parish communities*. Indeed they are "the Church living in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters" (Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, n. 26). It is gratifying to know that after the Second Vatican Council a multitude of services arose to which many lay persons have generously dedicated themselves, giving their time with great commitment to the *co-responsibility* which is theirs through Baptism and Confirmation.

The *diversity of tasks* sometimes makes it difficult to find the right way for dialogue and co-operation. Equal dignity does not mean equality of office and activity in the Good Shepherd's flock. The individual tasks of the Episcopal and priestly ministries cannot be simply handed over to lay persons. Conversely, Pastors are bound to respect the specific role of lay persons. Therefore it must not happen that the laity delegate their tasks to priests, deacons or professional assistants. Only if each assumes the specific role which belongs to him will *the common path of shepherd and flock be successful*.

I am anxious to express my deep esteem for you, dear brothers and sisters in the lay state. *Your commitment cannot be repaid in money*. Without you, parish communities would not only be poorer, but they would lack the essentials. I therefore beg you generously to continue your apostolate as lectors or Eucharistic ministers, as choir members or in prayer groups, as catechists who prepare children and young people for their First Communion and Confirmation. I would explicitly like to encourage lay people to co-operate closely with their priests.

I would also like to underscore the importance of parish councils, where pastoral problems are studied and resolved "by general discussion" (cf. *Apostolicam actuositatem*, n. 10). Dare to dialogue in your committees!

I cannot fail to mention the many men and especially the many women who sacrifice themselves without saying many words, but with a great *spirit of dedication in the area of charity*. They care for the elderly, the sick and the lonely. In this

way they ensure that those who are experiencing the dark side of life can understand the precise meaning of: "*The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want*".

5. "*You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies*" (Ps 23 [22]:5). Even when there are no violent persecutions, the task of witnessing as Christians is never easy. They often encounter mass indifference, which is no less difficult than hostility. Thus it happens that the priest and his co-workers prepare the *table of the Word and of the Eucharist*, but then have the disappointment of seeing that the number of guests who accept the invitation is smaller and smaller. The *table of prosperity and consumerism* seems to be more appealing. That is why there are many today who live as if God did not exist. Widespread forms of popular religious expression remain, which nevertheless lack the foundation of conscious conviction. They are therefore threatened with being drained in the face of increasing secularization. *Indifference to the Christian heritage is as dangerous as open hatred.*

Only a *new evangelization* will ensure that deepening of a pure and solid faith which can transform the traditions handed down into a liberating force.

Do we still have sufficient *resources* at our disposal to be able to live off them? Where are the *sources* from which we can draw? You, Christians of Austria, know where these sources are!

The old Europe, which wants to become a family of nations, seems decrepit. The continent is at the point of forgetting the message it received from the earliest centuries of the new era. In many Central and Eastern European countries it was forbidden to preach the Gospel for over 50 years. Under atheistic and dictatorial regimes the light in the tabernacles was extinguished. Churches became monuments of by-gone times.

Today, however, we can observe that those regimes have come to an end, while the ancient sources are still flowing freshly and abundantly: *Sacred Scripture* as the vein of truth; *the sacraments of the Church* flowing with the power of Christ's presence; *prayer*, through which the soul can breathe the fresh oxygen of God's grace.

6. These sources are open to everyone. They are available in particular to you, *young people*, who can draw from them. Know that the Pope *counts on you*. Even if at times you feel like a small flock, do not lose heart: you are the Good Shepherd's capital.

In the beginning 12 men went into the whole world. *The Pope trusts in you, young people, to give a new Christian face to the old Europe*. Commit yourselves by your personal witness. You are "*a letter from Christ*" (2 Cor 3:3), his visiting-card! Those who meet you must be sure they have found the right address.

In carrying out my pastoral ministry in the different regions of the world, I have experienced more and more the truth of what I wrote in the Encyclical *Redemptoris missio*: "People today put more trust in witnesses than in teachers, in experience than in teaching, and in life and action than in theories" (n. 42). When they meet you, your peers must be able to sense that there is something in you they cannot explain, something you know well, something the Psalm expresses very clearly: "*The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want*".

7. The *saints* drew from the inexhaustible sources of grace. This is why they are true missionaries (cf. *Redemptoris missio*, n. 2). Therefore the history of your country is also the history of your saints: it is a history which endures to our times.

Several months ago in Rome the priests Otto Neururer and Jakob Gapp were beatified. This Sunday in Vienna I will raise to the honour of the altars Sr Restituta Kafka, together with two other servants of God. What constitutes the summit of every shepherd's life is manifested in them: "*The Good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep*" (Jn 10:11). In recalling the dark chapters of history, the Church does not want to open old wounds, but wants to *heal our memory*. The perpetrators of violence have left the stage. The *heroes of love* have made their entrance. They have testified that the parable of the Good Shepherd came true during the tragic years of our century when even your land was violently shaken by evil. In their lives and in their deaths hope shines through: "*The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want*".

8. Dear brothers and sisters, your Chief Shepherd, Archbishop Eder, asked me to crown the statue of Our Lady of Fátima and to entrust the now 12-centuries-old Archdiocese of Salzburg to the protection of the Mother of God. I have gladly fulfilled this request. Your ancient and illustrious Church has always had a deep and sincere devotion to Our Lady. I am sure that the Mother of God will not reject your wish to have her as patroness and guide on your way.

I entrust your Archdiocese and each of you to her. May Mary shelter you beneath her mantle: "*We fly to thy patronage, O holy Mother of God, despise not our petitions in our necessities...*".

Under the protection of your mantle, O Mary, our anxieties and fears are overcome, and we rediscover trust and courage. Looking to you, we learn how to entrust ourselves to God with a confident and total, renewed abandonment: "*The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want*". Amen!

Before the final blessing of the Mass the Holy Father briefly greeted the representatives of other Christian denominations who were attending:

At the end of this solemn liturgical service dedicated to the theme of "mission", I would like to recall that Christians, despite what still separates them, are united in one Baptism and in acceptance of the Apostles' Creed. I extend a cordial greeting to the *Executive Board of the Ecumenical Council of Churches* in Austria, that is, to the President, *Metropolitan Michael of Austria*, to the Bishop of the Evangelical Church in Austria, *Magister Herwig Sturm*, and to the local representatives of ecumenical activity.

I thank them for taking part in this celebration. My appreciation also goes to those who devoted themselves in an exemplary way to the success of the *Second European Ecumenical Assembly in Graz*.

I hope that every effort will be made to continue the arduous process of reconciliation, so that the witness of Christians will give strength to all people of goodwill.

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