



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC VISIT TO CANADA

**ADDRESS OF POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO YOUNG, ELDERLY AND HANDICAPPED PEOPLE**

*Vancouver Stadium
Tuesday, 18 September 1984*

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. This evening we have come to celebrate life in Jesus Christ. In this stadium vibrant with music and dance, as a family comprised of young and old, disabled and strong, as friends united in Christ, we praise God for the gift of life. We join our hearts and voices to glorify the Creator of heaven and earth, the Lord and Giver of life. On my part I thank you for your warm welcome and for this outpouring of love expressed in song and gesture.

In this beautiful region of British Columbia, with your towering mountains, your rushing waters, your dense green forests and mineral-rich soil, you are surrounded by an abundance of natural life, with wild animals and a plentiful supply of fish. Captivated by this grandeur and beauty, one of the first explorers of this region, Captain George Vancouver, spoke of "the innumerable pleasing landscapes and the abundant fertility that unassisted nature puts forth". How true are the words of this explorer whose name is honoured by this thriving city.

We also celebrate the gift of human life, including the ethnic richness that has characterized the people of this area. There have been the Indian people, the first inhabitants of this land, who, in seeing life as the gift of a Supreme Spirit, were led to receive the Gospel of Christ when it was preached to them by the missionaries. There have been those of British extraction, too, who were the first settlers. Then came those from the Far East, those from India who came to work on the railways and in the development of resource industries. Later came immigrants from Eastern and Western Europe to push back further the frontiers of this new land. These varied immigrant

peoples, together with the Indians, are represented by the performers this evening. In them we see how the many immigrant streams have contributed to the rich cultural diversity characteristic of this area. May all who have inherited these blessings truly appreciate them and thus avoid any form of discrimination against people "in law or in fact, on account of their race, origin, colour, culture, sex or religion" (Pauli VI, *Octogesima Adveniens*, 16). All such discrimination is an affront to human dignity and a degradation of human life.

Above all, we celebrate tonight the gift of eternal life, which was won for us by Jesus Christ through his death on the Cross. In the reading from Saint John's Gospel this evening, Jesus says to us: "I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full" (*Jo. 10, 10*). Natural life and human life are precious gifts of God. But eternal life is an even greater gift, because it is the gift of life for ever.

The grace we receive in Baptism raises the quality of our life to a level far exceeding anything we could ever imagine, for we receive the pledge of eternal or everlasting life. This everlasting life begins now; through faith in the word of God and through the Sacraments of the Church, it will reach its completion in the world to come. This is the life described by Saint Paul: "The things that no eye has seen and no ear has heard, things beyond the mind of man, all that God has prepared for those who love him" (*1 Cor. 2, 9*).

I am very pleased that in the stadium tonight celebrating life with me are children and young people, senior citizens, and our brothers and sisters who suffer disabilities or handicaps of various kinds. I want to speak to each of these groups in turn.

2. Dear children and young people: my first words are for you. Do not let anyone deceive you about the real meaning of your life. It comes from God. You are here on earth because God made you. You come from him. You belong to him. And you will go to him. God is the source and goal of your life. He who has given you natural life has desired that you grow up in a rich and vibrant area of God's world. He has blessed you with many opportunities. Through Baptism, God has even given you a share in his own life. He has adopted you as his children. You are brothers and sisters of Christ.

In the Gospel reading, Jesus warns us that in the world there are thieves who come "only to steal and kill and destroy" (*Jo. 10, 10*). You will find these thieves trying to deceive you. They will tell you that the meaning of life is to have as much pleasure as you can. They will try to convince you that this world is the only world there is, and that you must grasp everything you can for yourselves, now. You will hear some people telling you: "Look after yourselves, and do not worry about others". There will be those, moreover, who will say: "You will find your happiness in accumulating money and as many consumer goods as you can, and when you feel unhappy use the escape of alcohol or drugs".

None of this is true. And none of this brings true joy to your lives. True living is not found in one's self or in things. It is found in someone else, in the One who created everything that is good, true, and beautiful in the world. True living is found in God and you discover God in the person of Jesus Christ. Christ reveals God to us, and to know Christ is to know God. And in order to know yourself, your real self, you have to know Christ. That is why Saint Paul can exclaim: "I believe nothing can happen that will outweigh the supreme advantage of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" (*Phil. 3, 8*).

I know that some of you go to Catholic schools. Why? So that you can more readily discover Christ and, in him, the full meaning of life. So that you can live life to the full. The Church has her schools because she wants to communicate Christ to you. She wants you to come to full maturity in him who is the perfect human being, and at the same time, the Son of God. Dear children and young people: look to Christ. When you wonder about the mystery of your life, look to Christ who explains to you its full meaning. When you wonder about your role in the future of Canada and the world, look to Christ. He will inspire you to fulfil your potential as Canadian citizens and as citizens of the world community. When you wonder about the life to come, look to Christ. Love him and serve him in your neighbour now, so that the fullness of eternal life may one day be yours.

3. Dear senior citizens: I now greet you, you who bear witness to the fact that the value of life lies in who you are, not in what you possess or in what you are able to do. Your life shows the continuity of the generations and gives you a horizon from which to judge new events and discoveries. You remind the world of the wisdom of earlier generations while you contribute your insights to this one.

I am happy to hear all the initiatives happening here in British Columbia to enhance the quality of your life and, in particular, to provide you with proper housing arrangements. In its Charter of the Rights of the Family, issued in 1983, the Holy See States: "The elderly have the right to find within their own family or, when this is not possible, in suitable institutions, an environment which will enable them to live their later years of life in serenity while pursuing those activities which are compatible with their age and which enable them to participate in social life" (*Charter of the Rights of the family*, art. 9).

The passing of the years brings its frailties. You may be forced to give up activities that you once enjoyed. Your limbs may not seem so pliable as they used to be. Your memory and your eyesight may refuse to give service. And so the world may cease to be familiar – the world of your family, the world around you, the world you once knew. Even the Church, which you have loved for so long, may seem strange to many of you as she goes forward in this period of renewal. Yet, despite changes and any weaknesses you may feel, you are of great value to all. Society needs you and so does the Church. You may not be able to do as much as before. But what counts above all is what you are. Old age is the crowning point of earthly life, a time to gather in the harvest you have sown. It is a time to give of yourselves to others as never before.

Yes, you are needed, and never let anyone tell you are not. The Masses you have attended throughout your life, the devout Communion you have made, the prayers you have offered enable you to bestow rich gifts upon us. We need your experience and your insights. We need the faith which has sustained you and continues to be your light. We need your example of patient waiting and trust. We need to see in you that mature love which is yours, that love which is the fruit of your lives lived in both joys and sorrow. And yes, we need your wisdom for you can offer assurance in times of uncertainty. You can be an incentive to live according to the higher values of the spirit. These values link us with people of all time and they never grow old.

Be aware of your dignity, then, and once again offer your lives to our Lord Jesus Christ. Take time to know him better than you have ever known him before. Listen to him in prayer as he says to you in your hour of weakness, sorrow or pain: "I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me" (*Jo.* 10, 14). He is close to you in the trials of your daily life. On your part, seek to be his faithful companions along the way of the Cross. And never forget that the troubles you have to undergo are foreseen in God's plan of preparing you to live to the full, in the company of Mary and all the saints, in the Kingdom of heaven.

4. Now I wish to speak to those suffering from disabilities and to those who offer them assistance. First of all, I rejoice at the sensitivity being shown to our disabled and handicapped brothers and sisters in Vancouver and throughout Canada, through worthy agencies, associations and institutions.

Dear brothers and sisters who are disabled in some way: the value and dignity of the human person does not arise from physical or mental qualities, from efficiency, productivity or speed in one's actions. It comes rather from the fundamental fact that each individual is created by God and redeemed by the blood of his Son Jesus Christ. God calls each of you by name. He wishes you to make your individual contribution to the world and to live life to the full in the service of others. God's fatherly care embraces the healthy and the sick, the disabled, the handicapped and the strong.

Dear friends who sometimes feel so discouraged: I am filled with joy being with you today. I have come to tell you that Christ loves you and that the Church and the Pope love you, too. You are special friends of Jesus. He says to you in a very personal way: "Come to me all who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest. Shoulder my yoke and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls. Yes, my yoke is easy and my burden light" (*Matth.* 12, 28-30). Christ is asking you to help him to carry his Cross. You fulfil in our day the role once exercised by Simon of Cyrene. You teach us, by your example, to unite our human limitations with the sufferings of Jesus, and to find joy in life.

But I have also come in order to assure you that the Church proclaims in a special way your right to work, as she strives to further the goal "that disabled people may be offered work according to

their capabilities" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II, *Laborem Exercens*, 22). She insists that to deny work to those who are not fully functional is also "a serious form of discrimination" (*Ibid.*).

Dear friends whose particular vocation is service to these brothers and sisters: your work requires generosity of mind and heart, a greatness of spirit; for God calls you to love with a special intensity. I know, however, that you are the first to say that you receive much more than you give. The disabled and handicapped call forth energies from our hearts that we never suspected were there. They teach us humility, too, for they show us that human and Christian greatness does not consist in being stronger or more active than others. They show all of us the need for continual dependence upon God. In the name of Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd. I thank you for all the care you give these important members of Christ's flock. You are the Lord's helpers in assisting these men, women and children to share life to the full.

5. Dear brothers and sisters: on this evening when we celebrate life, we are also mindful of the many threats to life which exist in our technological society. Of incalculable danger to all humanity is the rate of abortion in society today. This unspeakable crime against human life which rejects and kills life at its beginning sets the stage for despising, negating and eliminating the life of adults, and for attacking the life of society. If the weak are vulnerable from the time of conception, then they are vulnerable before the might of an aggressor and the power of nuclear weapons.

But there is a way for humanity to escape its own tyranny and avert the judgment of God: in the face of these evils which threaten life in our day, it must again proclaim in practice the sacredness of human life as a precious gift of a loving Creator – a gift to be accepted, respected and protected. "Against the pessimism and selfishness which cast a shadow over the world, the Church stands for life: in each human life she sees the splendour of that 'Yes', that 'Amen', who is Christ himself" (Eiusdem, *Familiaris Consortio*, 30).

The Church proclaims God's plan for all human life, God's plan for the love that generates life, and God's plan for the family which, as a community of life, has the mission "to guard, reveal and communicate love" (*Ibid.*, 17). This plan of God has been inscribed into the being of man and woman and gives a two-fold dimension to their conjugal union – that conjugal union which must express intimate communion of love and life, as well as openness to procreation. Because of the inseparable connection willed by God of the unitive and procreative meaning of the conjugal act, the Church proclaims that there can be total self-giving in marriage only if these two elements are not artificially separated (*Ibid.* 32). In the plan of God, respect for the meaning of the body and for openness to life is a necessary condition for ensuring the full dignity of the human person, the full dignity of human life.

Il faut défendre la vie dès la conception contre tout ce qui la menace, comme la faim et la guerre; il faut la guérir de ce qui l'affaiblit ou la déshonore, comme la maladie et les excès de l'alcool e de la drogue; il faut la protéger de ce qui la dégrade, comme la violence, les conditions de vie infra-

humaines, les conditions de travail indignes et tant de maux de cet ordre.

Contre les malfaiteurs de notre époque qui ne viennent "que pour voler, égorger et détruire" (Io. 10, 10), nous sommes appelés à réagir avec les armes de la vérité, de la justice et de l'amour. Soyons fermes dans la foi: nous croyons que le Christ a déjà remporté la victoire décisive sur le péché et la mort par sa Croix et sa Résurrection, et que par la foi il nous donne la vie en son nom.

Dans cette célébration de la vie, ce soir, nous tournons nos regards vers la Bienheureuse Vierge Marie, Mère de Dieu et Mère de l'Eglise. Elle a donné naissance au Sauveur, qui est la vie du monde; elle est avec nous dans cette célébration de la vie. Elle est proche de nous dans tous nos efforts pour favoriser la vie, pour guérir la vie, pour améliorer la vie et la défendre contre tout ce qui pourrait la blesser, l'affaiblir ou la détruire. Oui, elle est proche de nous dans nos efforts pour suivre Jésus, le Bon Pasteur, qui nous conduit vers la vie éternelle.

Dear brothers and sisters: This is our destiny: to live life to the full, in communion with the Most Holy Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, to whom "be all praise, honour, glory and power, for ever and ever" (Apoc. 5, 13).

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