



# The Holy See

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## APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO GREAT BRITAIN

### HOLY MASS IN PONTCANNA FIELDS

#### *HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II*

*Cardiff*

*Wednesday, 2 June 1982*

*Dear friends in Christ,*

1. Today we Bishop of Rome greets the people of Wales for the first time in their own beautiful land. It is a great joy for me to be with you here in Cardiff. I thank God for the privilege of celebrating the Eucharist with you, uniting with you in giving glory and praise to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.

Gathered at this Mass are representatives from every Catholic parish in Wales and members of the Church who have come from England. I also greet those representing the other Christian communities of Wales. In the love of Christ I greet you all.

The people of Wales have *an ancient tradition of allegiance to Christ*. From the earliest Christian times, you have proclaimed your love of Christ and you have sought to express this love through service to others and fidelity to the word of God. The seed of God's word first came to you from Rome; once planted, it took root, flowered and bore fruit. It found expression in your literature and left its imprint on your history. And it has remained alive in the hearts of every generation from Roman times down to the present age. It is this same Gospel which I proclaim to you today - the Gospel of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who is the Lord of history and the Bread of Life for a world in need of salvation.

2. The readings of the Mass today invite us to reflect on *the mystery of the Eucharist*. This great

mystery was foreshadowed in Old Testament times when God provided the Israelites with manna in the wilderness. In the first reading, we hear the words Moses spoke to the people: "Remember how the Lord your God led you for forty years in the wilderness . . . he fed you with manna which neither you nor your fathers had known, to make you understand that man does not live on bread alone but that man lives on everything that comes from the mouth of the Lord" (*Deut.* 8, 2-3). God taught the people that he alone was their Lord. He alone was the one who would lead them out of slavery. He alone was the one who would care for them amid the hardships and sorrows they would encounter on the way to the promised land. When they were hungry and thirsty, he gave them manna from heaven and water from the rock.

What was foreshadowed in Old Testament times has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. He gave his followers *food for the journey of faith* when he entrusted to the Church the gift of the Eucharist. Jesus himself is the new spiritual food, for the Eucharist is his body and blood made present under the appearances of bread and wine. He himself says in the Gospel: "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never be hungry; he who believes in me will never thirst" (*Jo.* 6, 35).

Here in Wales, the Eucharist has held a place of prominence in the Church from the earliest times.

This is shown by the Christian symbols of the Eucharist which have been discovered in the archaeological excavations at the Roman fort of Caerleon. Happily this great heritage has continued from the early beginnings down to the present time. This fact should not surprise us, since the Eucharist holds such a central place in Christian life and since *the mystery of the Eucharist is so closely linked to the mystery of the Church*. For every generation in the Church, the food which nourishes the people of God is the Eucharist, the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

3. What a beautiful prayer is recorded in today's Gospel. After Jesus speaks to the people about the true bread which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world, they cry out: "*Give us that bread always*" (*Jo.* 6, 34). This prayer expresses a deep hunger on the part of the people, one which goes beyond the hunger for food. It is a hunger which arises from the depths of the soul and from the desire for love and fulfilment. It is a longing for wholeness and salvation and a yearning for fullness of life - it is a hunger for union with God. Christ is God's answer to this prayer. God's response to the deepest hunger of the human heart. *All the anguished cries of mankind to God since the fall of Adam and Eve find fulfilment in the Son of God become man*. Jesus still says: "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never be hungry; he who believes in me will never thirst" (*Ibid.* 6, 35). May this same prayer - "Give us that bread always" - often be our prayer too. From our First Communion until the day we die, may we have a deep yearning for Christ, the true bread which gives life to the world.

4. And now I would like to speak to these little ones who are about to receive Holy Communion for the first time.

*Dear children:* Jesus is coming to you in a new way today, in a special way. He wants to live in you.

He wants to speak to you in your heart. He wants to be with you all through your day.

Jesus comes to you in the Eucharist so that you will live for ever. *Holy Communion* is not ordinary food. It is *the bread of eternal life*. It is something more precious than gold or silver. It is worth more than anything you can imagine. For this sacred bread is the body and blood of Jesus. And Jesus promises that if you eat his flesh and drink his blood, you will have life in you and you will live for ever.

You come to the altar today with faith and prayer. Promise me that you will try to *stay close to Jesus always*, and never turn your back on him. As you grow older, go on learning about Jesus by listening to his word and by talking to him in prayer. If you stay close to him, you will always be happy.

5. *Dear parents* of these children: your love for Christ has made this day possible. For you are your children's *first teachers in the ways of faith*. By what you say and do, you show them the truths of our faith and the values of the Gospel. This is indeed not only a sacred duty, but a grace, a great privilege. Many other members of the Church share in this task, but the main responsibility for your children's religious formation rests upon your shoulders. So try to make your homes genuinely Christian. Help your children *to grow and mature as Jesus did at Nazareth*, "in wisdom, in stature and in favour with God and men" (*Luc. 2, 52*). Allow no one to take advantage of their lack of experience and knowledge. As you share with them in their personal pilgrimage to God, may you always be united in prayer and worship and in humble love of God and his people.

6. *Dear teachers in our Catholic school:* you too deserve an honoured place in our celebration today. Together with the parents, you help to prepare the children for the worthy reception of the sacraments and for a more active role in the Christian community. You bring them to *a reverence and knowledge of God's word and you explain to them the doctrine of the Church*. And thus you introduce them gradually into the riches of the mystery of salvation.

You are heirs of a great tradition, and the People of God is in your debt. As you carry out your important mission in that special community of faith which is the Catholic school, may you have a *deep love for the Church*. May your love for the Church radiate through all your various activities and be reflected in the way you faithfully hand on the sacred deposit of the faith.

7. *Beloved brother priests:* this is a day of joy for you also, for these little ones are members of the parishes in which you have the privilege to serve. Together with their families and teachers, you introduce the children to the wider Christian community and *help them to grow to the fullness of maturity in Christ*. To them and to the whole parish, you seek to give a shepherd's care. May you

be the best of shepherds and model your lives on our Lord and Redeemer.

I know that your Bishops are anxious to develop throughout England and Wales practical programmes of *adult education in the faith*. I urge you be in the vanguard of those efforts, which are so important for the vitality of the Church.

I also encourage you to make the *worthy celebration of the Eucharist the first priority of your pastoral ministry*. Recall the words of the Second Vatican Council: "The other sacraments, as well as every ministry of the Church and every work of the apostolate, are linked with the Holy Eucharist and are directed towards it. For the most blessed Eucharist contains the Church's entire spiritual wealth, that is, Christ himself, our Passover and living bread" (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 5). No other work you do is of greater importance for the Church or of greater service to your people. For the celebration of the Eucharistic Sacrifice is the source and summit of all Christian life. Ensure that the Mass is celebrated with deep reverence and prayerfulness, and make every effort to foster the active participation of the laity. Bear witness to the Church's faith in the Real Presence of Christ by your own daily visit of Eucharistic adoration (Cfr. *ibid.* 18). And through the liturgical renewal that was willed by the Council, may all your parishes become communities alive with faith and charity.

8. My brothers and sisters, in Christ, every time we gather for the Eucharist, we take part in *the great mystery of faith*. We receive the bread of life and the cup of eternal salvation. This is the cause of our joy and the source of our hope. As we speak of life and the Bread of Life, let us also remember those who have died in conflicts through the world: in the conflict in the South Atlantic, in the conflict between Iran and Iraq, in every place where human blood is shed. And in the power of the Blood of Christ may we all find peace, reconciliation and Eternal Life. Amen.

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