



The Holy See

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

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Wellington (New Zealand), 23 November 1986

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. Give thanks to the Father who has made it possible for you to join the saints and with them to inherit the light. Because that is what he has done: he has taken us out of the power of darkness and created a place for us in the Kingdom of the Son that he loves".

Today on the Solemnity of Christ the King it is my honour and privilege to proclaim the unity of the universal Church in this land in the Pacific: here at Wellington, the Capital of New Zealand.

It is with great joy that I celebrate the Eucharist with you today. My heart is filled with a deep sense of gratitude to be able to join my voice with yours in praising and glorifying the Most Blessed Trinity. I greet with fraternal affection the Archbishop of this See, Cardinal Thomas Williams, Bishop Cullinane, and my other brother bishops. Together with them, I greet most cordially all my brother priests, the men and women religious, and all the faithful, particularly those from the Archdiocese of Wellington and the Diocese of Palmerston North.

To all of you I say: Let us give thanks to the Father!

"He has taken us out of the power of darkness!"

"He has created a place for us in the Kingdom of the Son that he loves!"

Yes, the Son that he loves!

This is the same Jesus of Nazareth, about whom there was heard a voice from on high saying:

"This is my Son, the Chosen One. Listen to him".

2. The Liturgy brings us today to the place where the words of Saint Paul are confirmed in a definitive way, the place where the truth of the Redemption is most fully revealed.

We are on Calvary at the moment of the Crucifixion. Together with Jesus, two criminals are also being crucified. One of these insults him, saying: "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us as well". But the second instead says: "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom". This second man believed in the Kingdom of the Crucified One. He believed in the Kingdom that draws near to each human person through Christ Crucified.

Truly, it was not flesh and blood that had revealed this truth to him, but the Father - this Father who frees us from "the power of darkness and creates a place for us in the Kingdom of the Son that he loves". The Son, Jesus, in agony on the Cross, says to his crucified companion: "Indeed, I promise you, today you will be with me in paradise".

3. The main theme of today's liturgy is expressed in the phrase: "Peace of heart is the heart of peace". These words on the Solemnity of Christ the King are confirmed by what Saint Paul proclaims in the second reading. Christ, the image of the invisible God, is at the same time "the firstborn of all creations". Moreover, "God wanted all perfection to be found in him and all things to be reconciled through him and for him, everything in heaven and everything on earth, when he made peace by his death on the Cross".

Peace of heart, peace of the human conscience, is precisely the fruit of this reconciliation through the Cross.

4. The scene of Jesus in agony on the Cross, hanging between two criminals, is a striking symbol of the mystery of reconciliation.

In the first place, it shows us vividly the horrifying effects of sin, the stark and terrible reality of evil, the awful consequences of disobedience and alienation from God. Who could gaze on the Cross of Christ and not acknowledge the reality of sin? And not only the reality of sin but also its destructive consequences?

Sin is a personal act which disrupts one's relationship with God and weakens the intellect and will. Sin also has an impact on others. "There is no sin, not even the most intimate and secret one, that exclusively concerns the persons committing it. With greater or lesser violence, with greater or lesser harm, every sin has repercussions on the entire ecclesial body and the whole human family".

Today's Gospel scene reminds us of an even greater reality than sin, a higher and more important truth: namely the redeeming love of Christ, a love which is stronger than evil, stronger than death. It was at this precise point in human history, when he was offering his life for us on the Cross, that

"God in Christ was reconciling the world to himself". As Saint Paul says regarding this event of loving mercy, "through his blood, we gain our freedom, the forgiveness of our sins".

Yes, Christ on the Cross "was reconciling the whole world to himself", all of humanity of every time and place, "everything in heaven and everything on earth". This is why the Son of God came into the world: "God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not be lost but may have eternal life".

And yet, reconciliation is offered to each person individually. Each one must freely decide to accept or reject it. We must remember the two criminals crucified with Jesus. Each of them acting by his own free choice responded to Jesus, but in opposite ways. God respects our human freedom. He generously offers us the gift of reconciliation, but he does not force us to accept. He gives us the freedom to reject it. We must freely choose it if we are to belong to the Kingdom of God.

5. And if we do desire to belong to the Kingdom of God, what are the ways in which this Kingdom of God begins to take root in the human heart? How do reconciliation and peace come about in our innermost self?

The first way, of course, is prayer. This means liturgical prayer in which we join ourselves with Christ the High Priest in the official worship of the Church, and individual prayer, when we meet the Lord alone in our soul. Prayer opens the mind and heart to God. It deepens our longing for his Kingdom. Prayer consciously links us to the Communion of the Saints who support us by their continual intercession.

A second way of gaining peace of heart is by accepting the Gospel message. Jesus began his public preaching with a call to conversion: "Repent, and believe in the Good News". The Church continues Christ's mission by condemning sin, calling people to conversion, and inviting them to be reconciled to God. And in every age, the Church proclaims the goodness and mercy of the Lord. She invites us all to "lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely" and to "run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith".

Dialogue is yet another way towards reconciliation and peace, that dialogue of faith which proceeds from a deep respect for others and a confidence in the ultimate victory of truth. In order that genuine dialogue may take place, "we must all apply to ourselves the word of God; we must relinquish our own subjective views and seek the truth where it is to be found, namely in the divine word itself and in the authentic interpretation of that word provided by the Magisterium of the Church". In this regard, I am pleased to know that in New Zealand you are striving to bring about a greater knowledge of God's word and to deepen your love for Christ.

The ways of conversion include penitential practices, almsgiving, fasting and whatever truly helps us pass from sin to spiritual freedom, from selfishness to justice and love, from hatred to a desire for peace. Through all the Sacraments of the Church, Christ himself establishes God's Kingdom in our hearts. In the Eucharist we receive the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world and grants us peace. In the Sacrament of Penance, the Lord reconciles us to himself and sends us forth to be servants of reconciliation in the world. Each of the Sacraments, in its own way, joins us with our Risen Saviour and renews in us the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

6. Peace, as well as love, is born from a new heart, a heart made new by God's gift of reconciliation. A new heart is the foundation of peace in the world. All truly human actions proceed from the heart, the innermost centre of the human person, the dwelling-place of our conscience and of our deepest convictions. This is why peace of heart is the heart of peace - peace inside families, peace within villages, towns and cities, peace between nations and in International life. Peace anywhere in the world is possible only if there is first of all peace of heart.

But this inner peace is continually threatened in our modern world. It is disturbed by human passions: by hatred, envy, lust for power, pride, prejudice and an uncontrolled desire for wealth. Violence and war come from our blindness of spirit and the disorder in our hearts. These lead to injustice, which in turn causes tension and conflict. In addition, people's consciences are often confused today by an ideological manipulation of information.

Clearly it takes great courage to open ourselves to conversion of heart and to maintain this conversion in humility and freedom. The obstacles to peace are many. "They are grave, they present serious threats. But since they depend on the spirit, the will, the human 'heart', with the help of God, people can overcome them. They must refuse to give in to fatalism and discouragement. Positive signs are already piercing the darkness". And let us never forget that the final triumph over darkness has already been won by Jesus Christ, the Light of the world.

7. Our hope for the victory of peace is rooted in our faith in God, the Creator of heaven and earth. From the very beginning, in the act of creation itself, God's goodness and providence are revealed. As the Book of Genesis says: "God saw all he had made, and indeed it was very good".

The created world is not the result of mere chance. It springs from God's love; it is sustained by God's love, and all the events of human history are subject to God's loving providence.

In the great event of the Incarnation - the mystery of God becoming man - we understand much more of the mystery of creation. For Christ is, as Saint Paul says, "the firstborn of all creation, for in him were created all things in heaven and on earth, everything visible and everything invisible".

God loved the world so much that, from the beginning, he intended through the human nature of Jesus his beloved Son to enter into union with all humanity. Being both God and Man, Jesus could

restore what sin had destroyed; he could bring creation back to its original destiny. Thus, in the words of Saint Paul, "God wanted all perfection to be found in him and all things to be reconciled through him and for him, everything in heaven and everything on earth".

The mystery of creation, then, is part of our celebration today on this feast of Christ the King, for Christ is also the Lord of heaven and earth, the one who reconciled all creation to himself and "made peace by his death on the Cross". With grateful hearts, we praise the Lord with the words of the Psalm:

"Know that he, the Lord, is God.

He made us, we belong to him, we are his people . . .

Give thanks to him and bless his name.

Indeed, how good is the Lord, eternal his merciful love.

He is faithful from age to age".

8. God made us.

Not only did God make us, but he "has made it possible for us to join the Saints and with them to inherit the light . . . He has taken us out of the power of darkness and created a place for us in the Kingdom of the Son that he loves . . . In him were created all things in heaven and on earth . . . all things were created through him and for him. Before anything was created, he existed, and he holds all things in unity".

Christ the King is the beginning.

He is the firstborn from the dead.

Christ the King is the head of his body the Church.

In him we have redemption, the forgiveness of Our sins.

In Christ the King all fullness dwells! Amen.

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