



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC PILGRIMAGE
TO NORWAY, ICELAND, FINLAND,
DENMARK AND SWEDEN

**CELEBRATION OF MASS IN THE PARK
OF THE CLOISTERED MONASTERY
OF THE BENEDICTINE SISTERS AT AASEBAKKEN**

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Copenhagen (Denmark)
Tuesday, 6 June 1989

“God loved the world” (Io 3, 16).

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. With these words of the Gospel fixed in our minds and hearts, we gather in this beautiful spot to celebrate the Holy Eucharist. I see represented among you the *many different groups of people who make up the Catholic Church in Denmark*. It is a joy for me to celebrate this Liturgy with Bishop Martensen, the clergy, the religious and all of you present.

We come together here at Aasebakken, *a Catholic place of pilgrimage in honour of the Virgin Mary “full of grace” (Luc. 1, 28)*, who by believing and obeying gave birth to the Eternal Son of the Father “who loved the world”. I greet the Benedictine nuns who pray and work here, and I thank them for the hospitality shown to us and to all those who come here as pilgrims.

To the whole Catholic community in Denmark, consisting of so many different elements, I express my affection in the Lord and my pleasure at being able to make this pastoral visit. Those of you who are Danish by birth and ancestry can be proud of your beautiful country and her history, so *deeply rooted in the Christian Gospel*. I am also happy to see among you representatives of the

Catholic communities of Greenland and the Faroe Islands, who have made the long journey in order to take part in this Mass.

Text in Danish

Selv om de Katolske menigheder i Danmark er små, er de ikke mindre vigtige for det hierarkiske fællesskab med den universelle Kirke, med hvilken de er knyttet med enhedens, barmhjertighedens og fredens band. Hele Kirken *henter styrke og inspiration for dens mission fra jeres bønner og gudsdyrkelse og fra jeres trofaste vidnesbyrd for Kristus.*

For nylig i Rom, sammen med mange af jer, havde jeg den glæde at ære en af Danmarks største sønner, Niels Steensen.

Matte *Kristi Ivs altid brænde klart*, gennem hans eksempel og hans bønner, blandt katolikkerne i hans fædreland.

I know that the Catholic Church in Denmark also includes a number of Poles, whose arrival in this country both at the beginning of this century and in more recent years has led to the establishment of many new Danish parishes.

Drodzy synowie i córki polskiego pochodzenia! Oby wiara Katolicka, którą wy i wasze rodziny przynieśliście z Polski, nie tylko została zachowana, ale również wzrastała w waszej nowej ojczyźnie. Zachowując wiarę i jej tradycje, pomagacie w budowaniu Kościoła w Danii. W ten sposób wraz ze wszystkimi waszymi braćmi katolikami w tym kraju dajecie swój wkład zarówno duchowy, jak i materialny w pomyślność społeczeństwa duńskiego. Niech dawne więzy przyjaźni, łączące Danię i Polskę, umacniają się w tym krytycznym, ale pełnym nadziei okresie dla kraju naszych przodków.

To all the *other groups of Catholics* I also extend a cordial greeting in the Lord: to the Croatians and Hungarians; to those from other countries in Europe; from North and South America and from Africa; from the Philippines and elsewhere in the Far East, who have left their mark on the Church especially in the Copenhagen area. I also greet those from Vietnam who have come here over the past twenty years in order to find refuge from the sufferings of their native land. From Vietnam you have brought a living faith. May it flourish and grow here, and enrich your new homeland.

I cannot fail to say a few words to the Catholic visitors from Germany.

Liebe Brüder und Schwestern aus Deutschland!

Seit vielen Jahren seid ihr mit der Kirche in Dänemark eng verbunden, Ihr habt ihr auf viele Weisen Hilfe und Unterstützung gegeben. Möge diese heutige Feier *das geistliche Band des*

Glaubens stärken, das alle menschlichen Unterschiede zwischen Völkern und Nationen übersteigt. Mögen wir alle in gegenseitiger Anteilnahme und Liebe vereint sein!

Finally, I wish to assure the members of *other Churches and Ecclesial Communities*, especially the Lutheran Church, that I am grateful for your presence here today. With God's help *may we walk together on the pilgrimage of faith that begins with Baptism*, so that in a world that often lacks faith we may bear effective witness to the divine love proclaimed in today's Gospel.

2. *"God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son" (Io. 3, 16).*

Dear brothers and sisters: these words were spoken by Christ to Nicodemus. They are recorded by the *Evangelist John* – the "beloved disciple" – who wrote his Gospel last, after those of Matthew, Mark and Luke. One can say that he *views things from a "more distant" perspective*. The words spoken to Nicodemus and etched in his memory are heard by John in the context of *all that Christ revealed* by word and deed, and especially by his Cross and Resurrection.

In today's liturgy we read these words *from yet another perspective*. *The Prophet Isaiah*, writing centuries before Christ, "looks", so to speak, at what lies ahead: at the future. What he describes, is destined to happen in the "fullness of time". Nevertheless, we are struck by the keenness of his vision: Behold, "to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder" (*Is. 9, 6*). Perhaps he wrote this at the birth of an earthly ruler, but the words refer to a Sovereign whom the Prophet called "Wonderful, Counsellor, *Mighty God*, Everlasting Father, *Prince of Peace*" (*Ibid.*). It is the text we read on the Solemnity of the Lord's Birth, at Christmas.

The Evangelist John is traditionally symbolized by an eagle. One might say that the "*eagle eye*" of *the Prophet and of the Evangelist* converge on the same mystery, expressed by Saint John in the words: "God loved the world so much *that he gave his only Son*". This "giving" goes beyond Christmas night at Bethlehem, beyond the Incarnation of God. It goes all the way to the Paschal Mystery: to the night that fell after Christ's Death and to the dawn that marked the Resurrection. *Through the events of the Paschal Mystery*, which remained so vivid in the memory of the Evangelist and of the earliest Church community, *the mission of Christ was fulfilled*: his messianic mission.

"God sent his Son into the world
not to condemn the world,
but so *that through him the world might be saved*" (*Io. 3, 17*).
This reveals the full meaning of the words: "God loved the world".

3. God *already* loved in this way *at the creation*. The Creator took delight in everything that came forth from the creative power of his Word. He rejoiced and continues to rejoice above all in man, created in his image and likeness. *The joy* which attended creation – as the Book of Genesis

reminds us – is *an expression of God's creative love*. He created because he loved.

It was by way of man's heart that sin entered the world; that is, through *man's refusal to accept the Love that is God*. It is a refusal that casts a shadow of evil and death over human history. In our day it takes the form of widespread indifference to the things of God, materialism that values "having" over "being", and a readiness to disregard human life or manipulate it without reference to *the inviolable dignity and rights possessed by every human person* from conception until natural death.

God called man into existence through love; he called him at the same time for love. Sin, however, *wounds even the most fundamental of loving relationships*, that of marriage, by making us think that it is too difficult, if not impossible, to be bound to one person faithfully for life. In a world in which the bitter fruits of sin are despair and loneliness – an existence without meaning, without love, without God – the Church says "yes" to *the mysteries of love and of life* (Cfr. Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Familiaris Consortio*, 11. 20. 30).

4. Can we not say that by man's sinfulness creation "tests" the Creator's love? From a human point of view we may be inclined to say so. But God is greater. *Love is greater than sin*. In the face of man's refusal God does not respond by refusing man. *God responds with more love. He responds with a Gift*.

"God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son...

not to condemn the world,

but so that through him the world might be saved".

Isaiah spoke of the "sovereignty" that the Messiah would possess.

Yes, *upon his shoulders was placed the sovereignty of the love that saves* – upon the very shoulders of the only-begotten Son who was destined to hang on the Cross at Golgotha. In that moment God loved the world in his crucified Son, and the Son – the Christ – *loved us even to the end*" (Cfr. *Io.* 13, 1).

Love is a saving force. It alone can save. God saves because he is Love. Christ saves because "he loved to the end": even to Death on a Cross. He had every reason and every right to *"judge the world"* – to condemn man because of sin. *He chose the love which saves*, which raises up again, which purifies, which sanctifies. Of this love Saint John says: "the light has come into the world" (*Io.* 3, 19). Love is the light of the world. Christ is that light.

5. *Light is opposed to darkness*. Of itself the "world" is not the light, even though to the discerning eye it can reveal God the Creator who is love. *The light which is in creatures is clearly not sufficient*. This is especially true if through sin man's spiritual gaze turns away from God's light. Then *the world becomes darkness rather than light*: it becomes a place of death for the immortal

human being.

Hence another light was necessary: not the light that the world can give. It was necessary that God should give his Son who is the Word, of one being with the Father. It was necessary that the Son should give himself on the Cross, that he himself should accept the death that awaited him in the world. *It was necessary that by this death he should conquer death*, that in the Resurrection he should reveal the power of life.

“God loved the world so much”. Through Christ’s Death, through his Cross and Resurrection, *the contrast between light and darkness*, between good and evil, can be seen still more clearly. Saint John was aware of this when he wrote:

“...everybody who does wrong
hates the light and avoids it.
for fear his actions should be exposed;
but the man who lives by the truth
comes out into the light
so that it may be plainly seen that what he does
is done in God” (*Ibid.* 3, 20-21).

These words express the fundamental *challenge of the Gospel: it is the unceasing challenge to come into the light.* Is the “wrongdoer” really *unable to come to the light*? Surely he is able to overcome the fear that his deeds will meet with condemnation. For, as the light of the world, *has not the Crucified and Risen Christ* come to save rather than to judge? Herein lies the challenge of the Gospel for each of us. The challenge to acknowledge in faith that

– *the “jealous” love* of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit revealed in Christ’s Paschal Mystery *remains in the world,*

– it remains in us. Amen.

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