



The Holy See

8th WORLD YOUTH DAY

LITURGY OF THE WORD
AT THE MCNICHOLS SPORTS ARENA OF DENVER

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Saturday, 14 August 1993

"The mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest mountain" (*Is 2,2*).

Dear Brother Bishops and Sisters in Christ,

Dear Archbishop, Pastor of this beloved Church of Denver,

1. Upon arriving in Denver I lifted up my eyes towards the splendor of the Rocky Mountains whose majesty and power recall that all our help comes from the Lord who has made heaven and earth (Cfr. *Ps 121,2*). He alone is the *rock of our salvation* (Cfr. *Ps 89(88), 26*). God has given me the grace to join my voice with yours *in praising and thanking our Heavenly Father for the "mighty works"* (*Act 2,11*) that he has accomplished since the Gospel was first preached in this region.

Today I greet all those whom Christ – the "pescador de hombres", the divine fisherman – has gathered into the net of his Church. "With the affection of Christ Jesus" (*Phil 1,8*), I thank *Archbishop Stafford of Denver, Bishop Hanifen of Colorado Springs, Bishop Tafoya of Pueblo, Bishop Hart of Cheyenne and the other Cardinals and Bishops present: the priests, the Religious and every one of you, for being "sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness"* (*Tit 2,2*). I cordially greet the Governor of Colorado, the Mayor of Denver, and the representatives of other Churches, Ecclesial Communities and religious bodies. Your presence encourages us to continue to strive for ever greater understanding among all people of good will and to work together for *a new civilization of love*.

2. The World Youth Day is a great celebration of *life: life as a divine gift and an awe – inspiring*

mystery. Young people from all over the world are gathering to profess the Church's faith that in Jesus Christ we can come to the full truth about our human condition and our eternal destiny.

Only *in Christ* can men and women find answers to the ultimate questions that trouble them. Only *in Christ* can they fully understand their dignity as persons created and loved by God. Jesus Christ is "the only Son from the Father... full of grace and truth" (*Io* 1,14).

By keeping the Incarnation of the Eternal Word before her eyes, the Church understands more fully her twofold nature – human and divine. She is the Mystical Body of the Word made flesh. As such she is *inseparably united with her Lord and is holy in a way that can never fail* (Cfr. *Lumen gentium*, 39). The Church is also the visible means which God uses to reconcile sinful humanity to himself. She is the People of God making its pilgrim way to the Father's house. In this sense she is *constantly in need of conversion and renewal*, and her members must ever be challenged "to purify and renew themselves so that the sign of Christ can shine more brightly on [her] face" (*Lumen gentium*, 15). Only when the Church generates works of genuine holiness and humble service do the words of Isaiah come true: "all nations shall stream toward her" (*Is* 2,2).

United to Christ as a visible communion of persons, the Church must take as her model the early Christian community in Jerusalem which devoted itself "to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (*Act* 2,42). If the Church is to be a credible sign of reconciliation to the world, *all those who believe, wherever they may be, must be "of one heart and one soul"* (*Act* 2,32). By your fraternal communion the world will know that you are Christ's disciples!

3. The members of the Catholic Church should take to heart the plea of Saint Paul: always be "eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (*Eph* 4,3). With gentleness and patience, revere the Church as Christ's beloved Bride who is ever vigorous and youthful. *So many problems arise when people think of the Church as "theirs", when in fact she belongs to Christ*. Christ and the Church are inseparably united as "one flesh" (Cfr. *Eph* 5,31). Our love for Christ finds its vital expression in our love for the Church. Polarization and destructive criticism have no place among "those who are of the household of faith" (*Gal* 6,10).

The Church in the United States is vital and dynamic, rich in "faith and love and holiness" (*1Tim* 2,15). By far the vast majority of her Bishops, priests, Religious and laity are dedicated followers of Christ and generous servants of the Gospel message of love. Nevertheless, at a time when all institutions are suspect, the Church herself has not escaped reproach. I have already written to the Bishops of the United States about the pain of the suffering and scandal caused by the sins of some ministers of the altar. I have told them that I share their concern, especially their concern for the victims of those wrong-doings. Sad situations such as these *invite us anew to look at the mystery of the Church with the eyes of faith*. While every human means for responding to this evil must be implemented, we cannot forget that the *first and most important means is prayer*: ardent, humble, confident prayer. America needs much prayer – lest it lose its soul (Ioannis Pauli PP. II

Epistula ad Episcopos Foederatarum Nationum Americae Septentrionalis, die 11 iun. 1993: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, XVI, 1 (1993) 1476ss).

4. On many issues, especially with regard to moral questions, "the teaching of the Church in our day is placed in a social and cultural context which renders it more difficult to understand and yet more urgent and irreplaceable for promoting the true good of men and women" (*Familiaris consortio*, 30). Nowhere is this more evident than in questions relating to the transmission of human life and to the inalienable right to life of the unborn.

Twenty-five years ago Pope Paul VI published the Encyclical "*Humanae Vitae*". Your Bishops recently issued a Statement to mark this anniversary. They call everyone "to listen to the wisdom of "*Humanae Vitae*" and to make the Church's teaching the foundation for a renewed understanding of marriage and family life" (NCCB, *Human Sexuality from God's Perspective: "Humanae Vitae" 25 Years Later*, conclusion). The Church calls married couples to responsible parenthood by acting as "ministers" – and not "arbiters" – of God's saving plan. Since the publication of "*Humanae Vitae*", significant steps have been taken to promote natural family planning among those who wish to live their conjugal love according to the fullness of its truth. Yet more efforts must be made *to educate the consciences of married couples in this form of conjugal chastity* which is grounded on "dialogue, reciprocal respect, shared responsibility and selfcontrol" (*Familiaris consortio*, 32). I appeal especially to young people to re-discover the wealth of wisdom, the integrity of conscience and the deep interior joy which flow from respect for human sexuality understood as a great gift from God and lived according to the truth of the body's nuptial meaning.

5. Likewise, building an authentic civilization of love must include a massive effort to *educate consciences in the moral truths which sustain respect for life in the face of every threat against it*. In her vigorous concern for human rights and justice, the Catholic Church is unambiguously committed to protecting and cherishing every human life, including the life of the unborn. As sent by Christ to serve the weak, downtrodden and defenseless, the Church must speak on behalf of those most in need of protection. It is a source of comfort that this position is shared by people of many faiths. Those who respect life must accompany their teaching about the value of every human life with concrete and effective acts of solidarity to people in difficult situations. *Without charity, the struggle to defend life would be lacking the essential ingredient of the Christian ethic*; as Saint Paul writes: "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (*Rom 12,21*).

Archbishop Stafford has told me of the deep concern of many Americans about urban violence as a negative "sign of the times" that needs to be read in the light of the Gospel. Violence is always a failure to respect God's image and likeness in our neighbor, in every other human person, without exception. Violence, in any form, is a denial of human dignity. The question which must be asked is: *who is responsible?* (Cfr. *Gen 1,26-27*) Individuals have a responsibility for what is happening. Families have a responsibility. Society has a heavy responsibility.

Everybody must be willing to accept their part of this responsibility, including the media. Including the media!

So the Pope is speaking against the television who presents him! I repeat once more – including the media which in part seem to become more aware of the effect they can have on their audiences. May I ask: *who is responsible for the media? Who is responsible?* And when the question is asked: *what is to be done?* Everybody must become committed to fostering a profound sense of the value of life and the dignity of the human person; the whole of society must work to change the structure and conditions which lead people, and especially the young, to the lack of vision, the loss of esteem for themselves and for others which leads to violence. But since *the root of violence is in the human heart*, society will be condemned to go on causing it, feeding it and even, to an extent, glorifying it, unless it reaffirms the moral and religious truths which alone are an effective barrier to lawlessness and violence because these truths alone are capable of enlightening and strengthening consciences. It is our responsibility. Ultimately, it is the victory of grace over sin that leads to fraternal harmony and reconciliation. 6. Brothers and sisters in Christ, I urge you to renew your trust in the richness of the Father's mercy (Cfr. Eph 2,4), in the Incarnation and Redemption accomplished by his beloved Son, in the Holy Spirit's vivifying presence in your hearts. This immense mystery of Love is made present to us through *Holy Church's sacraments, teaching and solidarity with pilgrim humanity*. The Church, through your Bishops and other ministers, in your parishes, associations and movements, needs your love and *your active support* in defending the inviolable right to life and the integrity of the family, in promoting Christian principles in private and public life, in serving the poor and the weak, and in overcoming all manner of evil with good.

May Mary, "full of grace", intercede for the Catholic community of Colorado and of the United States. May her example of discipleship draw each one of you to an ever more personal love of her Son our Lord Jesus Christ. May she who is the Mother of the Church teach you *to love and serve the Church* as she loved and served the first community of Christ's followers (Cfr. Act 1,14).

Through the Church, may you abide in Christ, the Prince of Peace and the Lord of our lives.
Amen. The Pope has not spoken against human freedom, liberty, especially American liberty.... He has spoken for freedom, for a good use of our freedom. Only a good use of our freedom is real freedom. And the Pope has not spoken against American civilization, American television. He has spoken for an authentic promotion of what is civilization, of what is culture, of what is human dignity.