



The Holy See

JUBILEE PILGRIMAGE
OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE HOLY LAND (MARCH 20-26, 2000)

HOMILY OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II

*Jordan – Amman Stadium,
Tuesday, 21 March 2000*

“A voice cries out: In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord! Make straight in the desert a highway for our God!” (Is 40:3).

*Your Beatitude, Brother Bishops and Priests,
Brothers and Sisters,*

1. The words of the Prophet Isaiah, which the Evangelist applies to John the Baptist, remind us of the path which God has traced through time in his desire to teach and save his people. Today, as part of my Jubilee Pilgrimage to pray in some of the places connected with God's saving interventions, Divine Providence has brought me to Jordan. I greet His Beatitude Michel Sabbah and thank him for his kind words of welcome. I cordially embrace the Greek Melkite Exarch Georges El-Murr and all the members of the Assembly of the Catholic Ordinaries of the Holy Land, as well as the representatives of the other Churches and Ecclesial Communities. I am grateful to the civil authorities who have wished to honour our celebration with their presence.

The Successor of Peter is a pilgrim in this land blessed by the presence of Moses and Elijah, where Jesus himself taught and worked miracles (cf. *Mk* 10:1; *Jn* 10:40-42), where the early Church bore witness in the lives of many saints and martyrs. In this year of the Great Jubilee the whole Church, and especially today the Christian community of Jordan, are spiritually united in a pilgrimage to the origins of our faith, a pilgrimage of conversion and penance, of reconciliation and peace.

We look for a guide to show us the way. And there comes to meet us the figure of John the Baptist, a voice that cries in the wilderness (cf. *Lk* 3:4). He will set us on the road that we must take if our eyes are to “see the salvation of God” (*Lk* 3:6). Guided by him, we make our journey of faith in order to see more clearly the salvation which God has accomplished through a history stretching back to Abraham. John the Baptist was the last of the line of Prophets who kept alive and nurtured the hope of God’s People. In him the time of fulfilment was at hand.

2. The seed of this hope was the promise made to Abraham when he was called to leave all that was familiar and follow a God he had not known (cf. *Gen* 12:1-3). Despite his wealth, Abraham was a man living in the shadow of death, for he had no son or land of his own (cf. *Gen* 15:2). The promise seemed a vain one, for Sarah was barren and the land was in other hands. But still Abraham put his faith in God; “he believed, hoping against hope” (*Rom* 4:18).

However impossible it seemed, Isaac was born to Sarah, and Abraham received a land. And through Abraham and his descendants the promise became a blessing to “all the families of the earth” (*Gen* 12:3; 18:18).

3. That promise was sealed when God spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai. What passed between Moses and God on the holy mountain shaped the subsequent history of salvation as *a Covenant of love between God and man* – a Covenant which demands obedience but promises liberation. The Ten Commandments etched in stone on Sinai – but written on the human heart from the beginning of creation – are the divine pedagogy of love, indicating the only sure path to the fulfilment of our deepest longing: the human spirit’s irrepressible search for goodness, truth and harmony.

For forty years the people wandered until they arrived in this land. Moses, “whom the Lord knew face to face” (*Dt* 34:10) would die on Mount Nebo and be buried “in the valley of the land of Moab . . . though no one knows the place of his burial to this day” (*Dt* 34:5-6). But the Covenant and the Law he received from God live on for ever.

From time to time the Prophets had to defend the Law and the Covenant against those who set human rules and regulations above God’s will, and therefore imposed a new slavery upon the people (cf. *Mk* 6:17-18). The city of Amman itself – Rabbah in the Old Testament – recalls the sin of King David in causing the death of Uriah and taking his wife Bathsheba, for it was here that Uriah fell (*2 Sam* 11:1-17). “They will fight against you”, God says to Jeremiah in the First Reading we have listened to today, “but they will not prevail against you, for I am with you . . . to deliver you” (*Jer* 1:19). For denouncing failures to keep the Covenant, there were Prophets, including the Baptist, who paid with their blood. But because of the divine promise – “I am with you . . . to deliver you” – they stood firm as “a fortified city, an iron pillar and bronze walls” (*Jer* 1:18), proclaiming the Law of life and salvation, the love which never fails.

4. In the fullness of time, at the River Jordan John the Baptist points to Jesus, the one upon whom the Holy Spirit descends like a dove (cf. *Lk* 3:22), the one who baptizes not with water but “with the Holy Spirit and with fire” (*Lk* 3:16). The heavens are opened and we hear the Father’s voice: “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (*Mt* 3:17). In him, the Son of God, the promise made to Abraham and the Law given to Moses are fulfilled.

Jesus is the realization of the promise. His death on the Cross and his Resurrection lead to the definitive victory of life over death. Through the Resurrection the gates of Paradise are thrown open, and we may walk once again in the Garden of Life. In the Risen Christ we obtain “the mercy promised to our fathers, to Abraham and his children for ever” (*Lk* 1:54-55).

Jesus is the fulfilment of the Law. The Risen Christ alone reveals the full meaning of all that happened at the Red Sea and Mount Sinai. He reveals the true nature of the Promised Land, where “death shall be no more” (*Rev* 21:4). Because he is “the firstborn from the dead” (*Col* 1:18), the Risen Lord is the goal of all our journeying: “the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end” (*Rev* 22:13).

5. During the last five years, the Church in this region has been celebrating the Pastoral Synod of the Churches in the Holy Land. All the Catholic Churches together have walked with Jesus and heard his call anew, setting out the path ahead in a General Pastoral Plan. At this solemn Liturgy I gladly receive the fruits of the Synod as a sign of your renewed faith and generous commitment. The Synod has involved a deeply felt experience of communion with the Lord, and also of intense ecclesial communion, like the disciples gathered around the Apostles at the Church’s birth (cf. *Acts* 2:42; 4:32). The Synod has made clear that your future lies in unity and solidarity. I pray today, and I invite the whole Church to pray with me, that the Synod’s work will bring a strengthening of the bonds of fellowship and cooperation between the local Catholic communities in all their rich variety, between all the Christian Churches and Ecclesial Communities, and between Christians and the other great religions which flourish here. May the resources of the Church – the families, parishes, schools, lay associations, youth movements – set unity and love as their supreme goal. There is no more effective way to be involved socially, professionally and politically, above all in the work of justice, reconciliation and peace, which is what the Synod called for.

To the Bishops and priests, I say: Be good shepherds according to the Heart of Christ! Guide the flock entrusted to you along the path that leads to the green pastures of his Kingdom! Strengthen the pastoral life of your communities through a new and more dynamic collaboration with the religious and laity. Amid the difficulties of your ministry, put your trust in the Lord. Grow closer to him in prayer, and he will be your light and joy. The whole Church thanks you for your dedication and for the mission of faith you carry out in your dioceses and parishes.

To the Religious women and men, I express the Church’s immense gratitude for your witness to

the supremacy of God in all things! Continue to shine forth as beacons of the evangelical love which overcomes all barriers! To the laity I say: Do not be afraid to take your proper place and responsibility in the Church! Be brave witnesses to the Gospel in your families and in society!

On this Mother's Day in Jordan, I congratulate the mothers present here, and invite all mothers to be builders of a new civilization of love. Love your families. Teach them the dignity of all life; teach them the ways of harmony and peace; teach them the value of faith and prayer and goodness! Dear young people, the path of life is opening up before you. Build your future on the solid foundation of God's love, and remain ever united in Christ's Church! Help to transform the world around you, by giving the best of yourselves in the service of others and of your country.

And to the children making their First Holy Communion, I say: Jesus is your best friend; he knows what is in your hearts. Stay close to him, and in your prayers remember the Church and the Pope.

6. In this year of the Great Jubilee, the whole pilgrim people of God returns in spirit to the places connected with the history of our salvation. After following in the footsteps of Abraham and Moses, our pilgrimage has now reached the lands where our Saviour Jesus Christ lived and travelled during his earthly life. "In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son" (*Heb 1:1-2*). In the Son all the promises were fulfilled. He is the *Redemptor Hominis*, the Redeemer of man, the hope of the world! Keeping all this before you, let the whole Christian community of Jordan be ever more steadfast in faith and generous in works of loving service.

May the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church, guide and protect you on the way! Amen.