



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO IRELAND

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II TO THE BISHOPS OF IRELAND

Dublin

Sunday, 30 September 1979

My dear Brothers,

1. Once again I want you to know how profoundly grateful I am to you for your invitation to come to Ireland. For me this visit is the fulfilment of a deep desire of my heart : to come as a servant of the Gospel and as a pilgrim to the Shrine of Our Lady at Knock, on the occasion of its centenary.

I come also as your Brother Bishop from Rome, and I have greatly looked forward to this day: so that we may celebrate together the unity of the Episcopate of our Lord Jesus Christ, so that we may give public expression to a dimension of our Episcopal Collegiality, and so that we may reflect together on the role of pastoral leadership in the Church, particularly in regard to our own common responsibility for the wellbeing of the People of God in Ireland.

We are deeply conscious of the special charge that has been laid upon us as Bishops. For "by virtue of sacramental consecration and by hierarchical communion" (*Lumen Gentium*, 22) we are constituted members of the College charged with the pastoral mission of our Lord Jesus Christ.

2. The Episcopal collegiality in which we share is manifested in different ways. Today it is expressed in a very important way : the Successor of Peter is present with you, in order personally to confirm you in your faith and apostolic ministry, and, together with you, to exercise the pastoral care of the faithful in Ireland. Thus, my pilgrimage as Pastor of the universal Church is seen in its deep dimension of ecclesial and hierarchical communion. And through the action of the Holy Spirit the teaching on collegiality finds expression and actuation here and now.

In my first discourse to the College of Cardinals and to the world after my election to the See of Peter, I urged "a deeper reflection on the implications of the collegial bond" ([17 October 1978](#)). I am also convinced that my meeting with the Episcopal Conference today leads to a better understanding of the nature of the Church, viewed as the People of God, "which takes its citizens from every race, making them citizens of a kingdom which is of a heavenly and not an earthly nature" ([Lumen Gentium](#), 13).

3. In our present meeting, we are living the experience of the People of God in Ireland, first in the "vertical" dimension, climbing up, as it were, through all the generations to the very beginnings of Christianity here. At the same time we are mindful of the "horizontal" dimension, realizing how the People of God in Ireland are joined in the unity and the universality of the Church with all peoples on the earth, how they share in the mystery of the universal Church and in her great mission of salvation. The Bishops of Ireland have, moreover, their own sharing in this dimension of the life of the whole Church because they share in the tasks of the College of Bishops: *cum Petro et sub Petro*. Hence this meeting of the Pope and the Bishops of Ireland is highly important and marvellously eloquent, for Ireland and for the universal Church.

4. The basis of our personal identity, of our common bond and of our ministry is found in Jesus Christ, the Son of God and High Priest of the New Testament. For this reason, Brethren, my first exhortation as I come among you today is this : "Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, who inspires and perfects our faith" ([Heb 12 :2](#)). Since we are pastors of this flock, we must indeed look to him who is the chief Shepherd—*Princeps Pastorum* ([1 Pt 5:4](#)) to enlighten us, to sustain us, and to give us joy as we serve the flock, leading it "in paths of righteousness for his name's sake" ([Ps 23 :3](#)).

But the effectiveness of our service to Ireland and to the whole Church is linked with our *personal relationship to him* whom Saint Peter also called "the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls" ([1 Pt 2:25](#)). The secure basis for our pastoral leadership is then a deep personal relationship of faith and love with Jesus Christ our Lord. Like the Twelve, we too were appointed to be with him, to be his companions (cf. [Mk 3 :14](#)). We can present ourselves as religious leaders of our people in the situations that deeply affect their daily lives only after we have been in prayerful communion with the Teacher, only after we have discovered in faith that God has made Christ to be "our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption" ([1 Cor 1 :30](#)). In our own lives we are called to *hear and guard and do* the word of God. In the Sacred Scriptures, and especially in the Gospels, we meet Christ constantly; and through the power of the Holy Spirit his words become light and strength for us and for our people. His words themselves contain a power for conversion, and we learn by his example.

Through prayerful contact with the Jesus of the Gospels, we, his servants and apostles, increasingly absorb his serenity and we assume his attitudes. Above all we take on that fundamental attitude of love for his Father, so much so that each one of us finds deep joy and

fulfilment in the truth of our filial relationship : *Diligo Patrem (Jn 14 :31)—Pater diligit Filium (Jn 3 :35)*. Our relationship with Christ and in Christ finds its supreme and unique expression in the Eucharistic Sacrifice, in which we act to the full : *in persona Christi*.

Our personal relationship with Jesus is then a guarantee of confidence for us and for our ministry. In our faith we find the victory that overcomes the world. Because we are united with Jesus and sustained by him, there is no challenge we cannot meet, no difficulty we cannot sustain, no obstacle we cannot overcome for the Gospel. Indeed, Christ himself guarantees that "he who believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do ..." (*Jn 14 :12*). Yes, Brethren, the answer to so many problems is found only in faith—a faith manifested and sustained in prayer.

5. Our relationship with Jesus will be the fruitful basis of our relationship with our priests, as we strive to be their brother, father, friend and guide. In the charity of Christ we are called to listen to and to understand them ; to exchange views regarding evangelization and the pastoral mission they share with us as co-workers with the Order of Bishops. For the entire Church—but especially for the priests—we must be a human sign of the love of Christ and the fidelity of the Church. Thus we sustain our priests with the Gospel message, supporting them by the certainty of the Magisterium, and fortifying them against the pressures that they must resist. By word and example we must constantly invite our priests to prayer.

We are called to show generously to our priests that human concern, personal interest and sincere esteem whereby they will readily perceive our love. Despite the multiplicity of our commitments, our priests must recognize in us the faithful reflection of the Shepherd and Bishop of their souls (cf. *1 Pt 2 :25*).

Our priests have made many sacrifices, including the renunciation of marriage for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven ; and they must be firmly encouraged to persevere. Fidelity to Christ and the demands of human dignity and freedom require them to maintain constancy in their commitment.

The pastoral solicitude we have for priests must also be shown to our seminarians. Let us exercise personally also our responsibility for their training in the Word of God, and for all the formation they receive in Ireland, and abroad, including Rome. In my letter to the Bishops of the Church on Holy Thursday, I wrote: "The full reconstitution of the life of the seminaries throughout the Church will be the best proof of the achievement of the renewal to which the Council directed the Church".

6. Like Christ, the *Bishop comes among the laity as one who serves*. The laity are the vast majority of the flock of Jesus Christ. Through Baptism and Confirmation, Christ himself gives them a sharing in his own mission of salvation. Together with the clergy and the religious, the laity make up the one communion of the Church : "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people" (*1 Pt 2 :9*).

The greatest expression of the Bishop's service to the laity is his personal proclamation of the word of God, which reaches its summit in the Eucharist (cf. *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 5). As a faithful steward of the Gospel message, each Bishop is called to expound to his people "the whole mystery of Christ" (*Christus Dominus*, 12).

As the Bishop proclaims the dignity of the laity, it is also his role to do everything possible to promote their contribution to evangelization, urging them to assume every responsibility that is theirs in temporal realities. In the words of Paul VI, "Their own field of evangelizing activity is the vast and complicated world of politics, society and economics, the world of culture, of the sciences and the arts, of international life, of mass media" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 70). And there are other spheres of activities in which they can effectively work for the transformation of society.

In accordance with the will of God, *the Christian family* is an evangelizing agent of immense importance. In all the moral issues of authentic Christian living, the laity look to the Bishops as their leaders, their pastors and their fathers. The Bishops must constantly reply to the great cry of humanity, usually not articulated in words, but very real: "We wish to see Jesus" (*Jn* 12 :21). And in this the Bishops have a role of great importance: to show Jesus to the world ; to present him authentically and convincingly : Jesus Christ, true God and true man—Jesus Christ, the way and the truth and the life—Jesus Christ the man of prayer.

7. Bishops are called to be true fathers of all their people, excelling in the spirit of love and solicitude for all (cf. *Christus Dominus*, 16). They should have a special care for those who live on the margin of society. Among those most needing pastoral care from Bishops are prisoners. My dear Brothers, do not neglect to provide for their spiritual needs and to concern yourselves also about their material conditions and their families.

Try to bring the prisoners such spiritual care and guidance as may help to turn them from the ways of violence and crime, and make their detention instead be an occasion of true conversion to Christ and personal experience of love. Have a special care for young offenders. So often their wayward lives are due to society's neglect more than to their own sinfulness. Detention should be especially for them a school of rehabilitation.

8. In the light of our commitment to Jesus, and to his Gospel, in the light also of our collegial responsibility, our meeting here today assumes a special importance because of the *present difficult time for Ireland*, on account of the whole situation relating to Northern Ireland. These circumstances impelled some people to advise me against making a pilgrimage to Ireland. These very difficulties, however, made it all the more important *to be here*, to share closely with all of you these uncommon trials, and to seek in union with you the aid of God and good human counsel. These reasons for coming here gain in eloquence if they are placed in the framework of my visit to the United Nations, where it will be my privilege and duty to seek out ways of living in peace and reconciliation throughout the world.

I am sure that the pastors of the Church in Ireland have a better understanding and deeper feeling for the painful problems of the present moment. Their duty, as I pointed out already, is to guide and sustain the flock, the People of God, but they can perform this duty in no other way than by suffering with those who suffer, and by weeping with those who weep (cf. *Rom 12 :15*).

On this point, I draw my conviction both from the Gospel and from the personal and historical experience that I had in the Church and nation from which I come. During the last two centuries, the Church in Poland has struck root in a special way in the soul of the nation. Part of the reason for this is that its pastors—its Bishops and priests—did not hesitate to share in the trials and sufferings of their fellow countrymen. They were found among those deported to Siberia in the time of the Czars. They were found in the concentration camps at the time of the unleashing of Nazi terrorism during the last war. This self-sacrifice and dedication confirmed more fully the truth about the priest, that he is "chosen from among men ... to act on behalf of men" (*Heb 5:1*).

9. Because of this faithfulness to their brothers and sisters, to their fellow countrymen, the sons and daughters of the same homeland, pastors, and especially Bishops, must reflect beforehand on how to prevent bloodshed, hatred and terror, on how to strengthen peace, and on how to spare the people from these terrible sufferings. This was the message that Paul VI repeated over thirty times, in appealing for peace and justice in relation to Northern Ireland. He never ceased to condemn violence and to appeal for justice. "We earnestly beg," [he wrote to Cardinal Conway](#) on the solemnity of Pentecost 1974, "that all violence should cease, from whatever side it may come, for it is contrary to the law of God and to the Christian and civilized way of life; that, in response to the common Christian conscience and the voice of reason, a climate of mutual trust and dialogue be reestablished in justice and charity ; that the real deep-seated causes of social unrest—which are not to be reduced to differences of a religious nature—be identified and eliminated".

These efforts, venerable and dear Brothers, must be continued. Faith and social ethics demand from us respect for the established State authorities. But this respect also finds its expression in individual acts of mediation, in persuasion, in moral influence, and indeed in firm requests. For while it is true, as Saint Paul says, that he who is in authority bears the sword (cf. *Rom 13 :4*), which we renounce in accordance with the clear recommendation of Christ to Peter in the Garden of Gethsemane (cf. *Mt 26 :52*), nevertheless, precisely because we are defenceless, we have a special right and duty to influence those who wield the sword of authority. For it is well known that, in the field of political action, as elsewhere, not everything can be obtained by means of the sword. There are deeper reasons and stronger laws to which men, nations and peoples are subject. It is for us to *discern these reasons* and in their light to become, before those in authority, *spokesmen* for the moral order. This order is superior to force and violence. In this superiority of the moral order is expressed all the dignity of men and nations.

10. I recall with deep satisfaction a significant feature in the series of events connected with my journey to Ireland. It is highly significant that the invitation from the Episcopate, through its four

Archbishops, was followed by invitations from other Churches, especially from Irish Anglicans. I take the opportunity to stress this once again and to express my renewed thanks and appreciation to them. I see in this circumstance a very promising sign of hope. In view of the reasons with which you are all familiar, I have been unable to accept this truly ecumenical invitation by visiting Armagh in Northern Ireland, and have been able to go no further than Drogheda. Nonetheless, the eloquence of this ecumenical readiness fully corresponds to what was expressed in my first Encyclical : "In the present historical situation of Christianity and the world, the only possibility we see of fulfilling the Church's universal mission, with regard to ecumenical questions, is that of seeking sincerely, perseveringly, humbly and also courageously the ways of drawing closer and of union ... We must seek unity without being discouraged at the difficulties that can appear or accumulate along that road; otherwise we would be unfaithful to the word of Christ, we would fail to accomplish his testament. Have we the right to run this risk?" (*Redemptor Hominis*, 6).

The witness to faith in Christ which we share with our brethren must continue to find expression not only in prayer for full unity but also in prayer and sustained effort for reconciliation and peace in this beloved land. This union of endeavour must lead us to take into consideration the whole mechanism of strife, cruelty, and growing hatred, in order to "overcome evil with good" (*Rom 12 :12*).

What are we to do? I earnestly hope that, in a continued effort, you and our brothers in the faith will become spokesmen for the just reasons of peace and reconciliation before those who wield the sword and those who perish by the sword. How sad it is to think of all the lives that have been lost, especially the lives of young people. What a terrible loss for their country, for the Church, for the whole of humanity!

11. Venerable Pastors of the Church in Ireland : this service to justice and social love that is yours to perform in this present moment is difficult. It is difficult, but it is your duty ! Do not fear: Christ is with you ! He will give you his Holy Spirit : the Spirit of counsel and fortitude. And although this Spirit of God is frequently resisted, in the heart of man and in the history of humanity, by "the spirit of this world" and by "the spirit of darkness", nevertheless the final victory can only be that of love and truth. Continue steadfast in the difficult service that is yours, doing everything "in the name of the Lord Jesus" (*Col 3 :17*). Be assured that in your ministry you have my support and that of the universal Church. And all men and women of good will stand by you in the quest for peace, justice and human dignity.

Dear Brothers: In the name of Jesus Christ and his Church I thank you—and through you, all Ireland. I thank you for your fidelity to the Gospel, for your everlasting contribution to the spread of the Catholic faith, for your authentic and irreplaceable service to the world.

As far as the future goes, Brethren, courage and trust !

Walk in the illumination of the Paschal Mystery—in that light which must never be extinguished in your land! Go forward in the power of the Holy Spirit, in the merits of Jesus Christ!

And rejoice with a great joy in the unfailing intercession and protection of Mary, Great Mary, Mother of God, Queen of the Apostles, Queen of Ireland, Queen of Peace !

Brethren, let us go forward together, for the good of Ireland and for the glory of the Most Holy Trinity. And therefore "Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, who inspires and perfects our faith".

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