



The Holy See

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

MEETING WITH THE ELDERLY AND THE SICK

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Cathedral of Saint Henrik, Helsinki
Tuesday, 6 June 1989

Praised be Jesus Christ!

Beloved Brothers and Sisters,

1. The Lord has brought us to a new day. In this morning hour he is with us as we gather under the roof of this noble cathedral and thank him for the gift of life and the wonders of his mercy. At the same time we entrust the future to him. Yesterday, today and tomorrow belong to him.

For the first time in history the Bishop of Rome sets foot in this cathedral, dedicated to Saint Henrik, the holy Patron of Finland. My heart rejoices that I can do so with you: *the elderly and the sick* as well as the *priests and the religious sisters and brothers of Finland*. It is a privilege for me to speak to you, *to be with you*, because you are all special in the eyes of the Lord.

2. We have just heard the extraordinary words of the Beatitudes: "Blessed are the poor . These words are addressed to all of us but especially to those who have the *heavy cross of pain or sickness* to bear. The Lord says to you this morning: "Blessed are you". In your *weakness and dependence* you often realize better than others that we are all poor, weak and ultimately dependent on Christ, who says: "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing" (*Jo. 15, 5*).

How can I be blessed, you ask yourself? For the most part, modern society idolizes health, youth, power and beauty. The sick and the old seem to lack precisely those things that the world so much

admires. But there is a *higher wisdom*; a wisdom that reveals the true meaning of our human weakness and our pain. That wisdom is *revealed in Christ*. He knows what it is to suffer; he experienced it on the road to Calvary. He was scourged and crowned with thorns; he had to carry the cross and was crucified.

Christ associates with himself in the closest possible way all those who suffer. If any of your relatives, neighbours and those looking after you do not fully understand how much you suffer, be assured that Christ the Lord does. Not only does the Lord understand our sufferings but he teaches us that suffering, pain, growing old, and death itself – all these things have *an immense value when they are united with his own Passion and Death*. In fact Jesus says that no one can claim to follow him without taking up his cross.

3. In the Gospel of Saint John we read: “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes him should not perish but have eternal life” (*Ibid.* 3, 16). Jesus Christ is God’s definitive word about the human condition, and therefore also about suffering. *In the plan of God all life has value*, because from the moment of conception onwards there is a meeting, a dialogue between the Creator and the creature, between the divine and human. That dialogue takes its highest form in prayer and worship, and it reaches special intensity in our loving obedience to God’s will, when we accept life, with all its difficulties and sufferings, as a sharing in the work of redemption.

All of you therefore have *a special apostolate*: it is to be united with Christ and to pray for those who do not know him. I ask you to pray for me as well and for the Catholic Church throughout the world. I ask you to pray for those who cannot pray and who do not know how to pray, and for all who have lost faith in God and in his mercy. Allow the light and the healing presence of Christ to shine through your lives so that all who come into contact with you will discover the loving kindness of God.

4. The presence here of *the priests, and religious sisters and brothers* is also a cause of great joy for me. Dear brothers and sisters: your special vocations in the Church speak of the mystery of God’s grace working in your hearts and – through you – building up his Kingdom in this part of the world. In the words of Saint Paul, you have been called to the priesthood or religious life “by the mercy of God” (*2Cor.* 4, 1). His grace is your guarantee and the source of your happiness and spiritual efficacy.

God’s grace has been given to us through the Redemption accomplished by his Son and the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the Church. As ministers of God’s grace, my brothers in the priesthood, may you proclaim the Gospel and celebrate the sacraments with a profound reverence for the mysteries which transform the lives of all who believe. In your prayer, reflect frequently upon the ministry which has been entrusted to you by Christ. It is he whom you serve, and it is he who, in many hidden ways, can be trusted to bring forth a rich harvest from all that you sow.

My dear religious brothers and sisters: in a world which too often seeks fulfilment in material comforts and the manipulation of power, a world striving for happiness without a clear reference to God, *you stand out as signposts pointing to higher values*. Your configuration with Christ and your observance of the evangelical counsels recall Christ's words: "My kingdom is not of this world" (*Io. 13, 36*). *You are ambassadors of the one who proclaimed the striking message of the Beatitudes* which ushered in a "newness" of life which our contemporaries seek but do not always know how to find. They yearn for a better world, without famine and war, without the threat of nuclear destruction, without the hatred and injustices which demean human life; but they do not always recognize the depths of *conversion and reconciliation*, which such a transformation of life requires. That is the wisdom which you must deepen through prayer and contemplation, so as to share it bountifully with those who "call you to account for the hope that is in you" (*1Petr 3, 15*).

I greet each one of you. I rejoice in your fidelity and I pray that by "seeing your good works", generous young men and women of Finland will follow in your footsteps for the glory of our Father who is in heaven (*Cfr. Matth. 5, 16*).

5. The *last hour of my pastoral visit to Finland* is drawing near. I came here with a message of love and peace to all men and women of good will. I have seen the situation of the Catholic Church in Finland at first hand, and I give thanks to God for your communion with the See of Peter and your fidelity to the teachings of the Catholic Church. I encourage you all, laity as well as priests and religious, to remain steadfast in the love of Christ and in the unity of the Church. Like the early Church, you are a small community. I remind you of the words of Christ in the Book of Revelation: "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore" (*Apoc. 1, 27*). Yes, Christ is your strength today and always!

The medieval hymn in honour of Saint Henrik has the following refrain, which expresses an unflinching security for a world often marked by lack of hope:

"Ergo plebs fennonica,
Gaude de hoc dono
Quod facta es catholica
Verbi Dei sono".

"And so people of Finland,
Rejoice in this gift
that you have become Catholic,
through the preaching of the word of God",

People of Finland – Do not lose hope!
Be firm in your faith and generous in your love!

In a short time, we will all join in praying to God our Father in the Finnish language. May we lift up our hearts with confidence and joy, knowing that he whose name is holy and who gives us our daily bread is the source of all goodness and love.

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