



# The Holy See

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

## VISIT TO THE CATHOLIC CATHEDRAL OF SAINT ERIK

### *ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II*

*Stockholm*

*Thursday, 8 June 1989*

*Dear Bishops Brandenburg and Kenney,  
Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,*

1. It is very fitting that we should profess our faith on this joyful occasion using the words of the Creed. In doing so we recall the great doctrinal truths which are the object of our Christian faith. This ancient Creed confirms our *living communion* with those who have gone before us and with all those who in every time and place have professed *the faith entrusted by Christ to the "One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church"*.

The preaching of the Gospel and the profession of faith which constitute the Church's living tradition are a light shining in the darkness, "until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts" (2Petr. 1, 29). The faith which we have received as a gift is *a sacred trust which must be handed on to others*. There is an urgency about the truths of Christianity, a missionary dimension to its saving message. The faith is meant to be Good News for others, as well as for ourselves.

Just as once the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul filled the known world with the name of Jesus, so too do I, the Successor of Peter, consider it *my primary duty to preach Christ to those both near and far and to encourage you, my brethren* in "the household of faith" (Gal. 6, 10), to "*run with perseverance the race that is set before us*" (Hebr. 12, 1). In this cathedral, the centre of ecclesial life in the Diocese of Stockholm, I join you in giving thanks to God for the gift of faith that you have received, and I ask him to strengthen you in your love for Christ and his Church, and in your

commitment to preaching the Good News to others.

2. Today Christ is calling each of us, through the vocation we have received as bishops, priests, religious or laity, to *speak to the heart of Sweden*. For a thousand years Sweden's history and culture have been formed by the Gospel. In every generation, the Church must proclaim the Gospel anew. She must repeat, in season and out of season (Cfr. *2Tim.* 4, 2), the imperatives that stand at the heart of all Christian preaching: "Be reconciled to God" (*2Cor.* 5, 20) and "put on a new nature, one created after the likeness of God in the holiness of truth" (*Eph.* 4, 23). This insistent call is one which needs to be heard in the Sweden of today, and it is you whom God has chosen and sent to be its heralds.

In order to bring the message of conversion and reconciliation in Christ to others, we must first live it ourselves. It is not enough for us to point to Christ; in a certain sense *we have become Christ* through Baptism. In the words of Saint Augustine: "Let us rejoice and give thanks: we have not only become Christians, but Christ himself... Stand in awe and rejoice; we have become Christ" (S. Augustini *In Ioann. Evang. Tract.*, 21, 8). From our baptismal union with Christ in the mystery of his Death and Resurrection, we have received a vocation to holiness (*Rom.* 6, 9-12), a call to be perfect, as our heavenly Father is perfect (Cfr. *Matth.* 5, 48).

Dear brothers and sisters: *Sweden needs living signs of Christ*, who hold fast to God's word in their hearts, who abide in him through the sacraments, who put the Beatitudes into practice and who love all, especially the least of their brothers and sisters. This is what it means to be consecrated in truth (Cfr. *Jo.* 17, 19) and live the faith that we profess in the Creed.

3. To *my dear brothers priests* here today I wish to say that this is your vocation in a very special sense: that you yourselves be sanctified (*1Thess.* 4, 3) and then, acting in the person of Christ, that you sanctify others. Never forget that you are, in the words of Saint Paul, "servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God" (*1Cor.* 4, 1). As *ministers of the sacraments*, you bring the gift of salvation to God's people and nourish the divine life that they have received from Christ. As *trusted shepherds*, you are also their spiritual physicians and guides. You must strengthen the weak, encourage the doubting, and bring back those who stray.

In order to fulfil this special vocation, you need to be conformed ever more closely to the image of Christ the High Priest, the obedient Son of the Father and the Victor of the Cross. Only by becoming another Christ, *alter Christus*, in every fibre of your being, will you find fulfilment in your calling and be faithful to the grace which God poured out upon you at your ordination. The challenge to put on Christ requires a constant conversion. As I said in my first Holy Thursday letter to priests, "we must rediscover every day the gift given us by Christ himself in the Sacrament of Orders, learning to appreciate the importance of the salvific mission of the Church, reflecting on our own vocation in the context of that mission" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Epistula ad universos Ecclesiae Sacerdotes adveniente feria V in Cena Domini*, anno MCMLXXIX, 10, die 8 apr. 1979:

*Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II, II [1979] 857 ss.).*

Dear brothers: this is what the People of God expect of us. This is what the People of God in Sweden expect of you. They want to see Christ in you. They want to *hear his message from you*, even when that message speaks of the Cross, of dying to our old life, and to a human way of thinking, in order to rise to new life in God. They want to *be inspired by your words and your example*, so that they can fulfil the duties of their state in life in accordance with God's will. And though they may not admit it, many of those who claim to be unbelievers have a secret desire to be found by God. As priests you have a special responsibility *to seek out those who are lost*. I pray that you will be sustained by God's never-failing grace in all that you undertake in his name.

4. Dear *brothers and sisters in religious life*: I also wish to encourage you in your service to Christ and his Church in Sweden. This service is very evident in your various apostolates, particularly in the education of the young and the care of the sick, the elderly and the poor. But even more important than what you do is *what you are: persons consecrated to God in Jesus Christ* as his exclusive possession (Cfr. Eiusdem. *Redemptionis Donum*, 15).

You are special signs of *God's kingdom* in Sweden today – a kingdom that is “not of this world” (Cfr. *Io.* 18, 36) yet transforms this world from within. By living a life of service in chastity, poverty and obedience, you remind people that there is *more to this world than meets the eye*. There is a *transcendent, spiritual vocation and destiny to which every person is called by God*. This is a message that Sweden needs to hear from you, in keeping with the long tradition of religious life in this country that goes back to Saint Ansgar and Saint Birgitta.

In order to challenge the world with a message of conversion and reconciliation, you too must first hear and accept it within yourselves, and within your own religious institutes. By prayer, reflection and an ever more generous gift of self, you will find *the love you need in order to live in community and to carry out the duties of your apostolate* “not reluctantly or under compulsion, but cheerfully” (Cfr. *2Cor.* 9, 7). Although the way may sometimes be “narrow and hard” (*Matth.* 7, 14), you will come to recognize ever more clearly that *the Lord is “in your midst”* (Cfr. *ibid.* 18, 20). I urge you to grow in Christian maturity every day, to deepen your understanding of what it means to follow Christ as religious, so that you may then bring him to others, and others to him.

5. Dear *members of the Pastoral Council and other lay men and women* of the Diocese of Stockholm: You too are called to seek holiness and to share fully in the Church's mission, no less than the priests and religious who are your brothers and sisters in the Lord. As I stated last year in my Apostolic Exhortation “*Christifideles Laici*”: “The lay faithful must see their daily activities as an occasion to *join themselves to God*, fulfil his will, serve other people and lead them to communion with God in Christ” (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Christifideles Laici*, 17).

Although as Catholics you constitute a religious minority in Sweden, *religious freedom enables you*

*to share fully* in the life of your country. All the greater then is the challenge to make a contribution to Swedish society *worthy of Catholic faith and morals*, in ecumenical collaboration with Christians of other Churches and Ecclesial Communities. Among your neighbours, friends and relatives – at home, in school and at your place of employment – *you are Christ*, inviting people to “put on the new nature”, “to be reconciled with God”.

I wish to recall in particular the two great tasks mentioned in my Apostolic Exhortation as being particularly entrusted to *lay women* in furthering the Church’s saving mission today. The first is “the task of bringing *full dignity to the conjugal life and to motherhood...* as a result of the intelligent, loving and decisive intervention of women” (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Christifideles Laici*, 51). The second is “the task of *assuring the moral dimension of culture*, the dimension, namely, of a culture worthy of the person” (*Ibid.*). This is especially important at a time in history when developments in science and technology are not always inspired and measured by true wisdom, but rather offer the odious prospect of making life increasingly “dehumanized”. By virtue of their *specific sensitivity*, women can offer an immense contribution towards promoting the true welfare of the person, beginning with the fundamental value of life itself (Cfr. *ibid.*).

These tasks, dear brothers and sisters, are only two examples of the many ways in which the lay faithful are challenged to bear witness to the Gospel by *transforming humanity with the light of Christ*. It is also an encouraging sign for the Church in Sweden that so many of you are serving as *catechists*, members of advisory bodies, or involved in *charitable activities*, youth work, and other endeavours.

6. Finally, to all of you present here – clergy, religious and laity – I say: Do not be afraid! Many of you have come to Sweden from other countries in order to escape political or economic hardship, or as clergy and religious in order to serve the Catholics of this land. This involves many hardships, sacrifices and challenges, but with Saint Paul we can “rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, endurance produces character, character produces hope, and *hope does not disappoint* us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts” (rom. 5, 3-5). Yes, dear brothers and sisters, with God’s love within our hearts *we need not fear*.

Never shrink from the task of preaching the Gospel and professing your faith among those who are indifferent or unbelieving. Never lose confidence in *the fundamental goodness of man*, formed in God’s image and redeemed in Christ. Through the grace of God even *the most indifferent and unbelieving of hearts can be opened to the Truth, Beauty and Goodness* for which they were created. Above all, *never lose confidence in the power of God* which accompanies our proclamation of the word, a power that is able “to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think” (*Eph. 3, 20*).

Dear friends in Christ: so that we may be worthy of God’s blessing let us now pray together in the words that Jesus himself has taught us.

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