

PILGRIMAGE
OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE HOLY LAND
(8-15 MAY 2009)

HOLY MASS

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

*International Stadium - Amman
Fifth Sunday of Easter, 10 May 2009*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I rejoice that we are able to celebrate this Eucharist together at the beginning of my Pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Yesterday, from the heights of Mount Nebo, I stood and looked out upon this great land, the land of Moses, Elijah, and John the Baptist, the land where God's ancient promises were fulfilled in the coming of the Messiah, Jesus our Lord. This land witnessed his preaching and miracles, his death and resurrection, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the Church, the sacrament of a reconciled and renewed humanity. As I pondered the mystery of God's fidelity, I prayed that the Church in these lands would be confirmed in hope and strengthened in her witness to the Risen Christ, the Savior of mankind. Truly, as Saint Peter tells us in today's first reading, "there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we are to be saved" (*Acts* 4:12).

Today's joyful celebration of the Eucharistic sacrifice expresses the rich diversity of the Catholic Church in the Holy Land. I greet all of you with affection in the Lord. I thank His Beatitude Fouad Twal, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, for his kind words of welcome. My greeting goes also to the many young people from Catholic schools who today bring their enthusiasm to this Eucharistic celebration.

In the Gospel we have just heard, Jesus proclaims: "I am the good shepherd... who lays down his life for the sheep" (*Jn* 10:11). As the Successor of Saint Peter, to whom the Lord entrusted the care of his flock (cf. *Jn* 21:15-17), I have long awaited this opportunity to stand before you as a witness to the Risen Savior, and to encourage you to persevere in faith, hope and love, in fidelity to the ancient traditions and the distinguished history of Christian witness which you trace back to the age of the Apostles. The Catholic community here is deeply touched by the difficulties and uncertainties which affect all the people of the Middle East. May you never forget the great dignity which derives from your Christian heritage, or fail to sense the loving solidarity of all your brothers and sisters in the Church throughout the world!

"I am the good shepherd", the Lord tells us, "I know my own, and my own know me" (*Jn* 10:14). Today in Jordan we celebrate the World Day of Prayer for Vocations. As we reflect on the Gospel of the Good Shepherd, let us ask the Lord to open our hearts and minds ever more fully to hear his call. Truly, Jesus "knows us", even more deeply than we know ourselves, and he has a plan for each one of us. We know, too, that wherever he calls us, we will find happiness and fulfilment; indeed, we will find our very selves (cf. *Mt* 10:39). Today I invite the many young people here present to

consider how the Lord is calling you to follow him and to build up his Church. Whether it be in the priestly ministry, in consecrated life or in the sacrament of marriage, Jesus needs you to make his voice heard and to work for the growth of his Kingdom.

In today's second reading, Saint John invites us to "think of the love that the Father has lavished on us" by making us his adopted children in Christ. Hearing these words should make us grateful for the experience of the Father's love which we have had in our families, from the love of our fathers and mothers, our grandparents, our brothers and sisters. During the celebration of the present Year of the Family, the Church throughout the Holy Land has reflected on the family as a mystery of life-giving love, endowed in God's plan with its own proper calling and mission: to radiate the divine Love which is the source and the ultimate fulfilment of all the other loves of our lives. May every Christian family grow in fidelity to its lofty vocation to be a true school of prayer, where children learn a sincere love of God, where they mature in self-discipline and concern for the needs of others, and where, shaped by the wisdom born of faith, they contribute to the building of an ever more just and fraternal society. The strong Christian families of these lands are a great legacy handed down from earlier generations. May today's families be faithful to that impressive heritage, and never lack the material and moral assistance they need to carry out their irreplaceable role in service to society.

An important aspect of your reflection during this Year of the Family has been the particular dignity, vocation and mission of women in God's plan. How much the Church in these lands owes to the patient, loving and faithful witness of countless Christian mothers, religious Sisters, teachers, doctors and nurses! How much your society owes to all those women who in different and at times courageous ways have devoted their lives to building peace and fostering love! From the very first pages of the Bible, we see how man and woman, created in the image of God, are meant to complement one another as stewards of God's gifts and partners in communicating his gift of life, both physical and spiritual, to our world. Sadly, this God-given dignity and role of women has not always been sufficiently understood and esteemed. The Church, and society as a whole, has come to realize how urgently we need what the late Pope John Paul II called the "prophetic charism" of women (cf. *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 29) as bearers of love, teachers of mercy and artisans of peace, bringing warmth and humanity to a world that all too often judges the value of a person by the cold criteria of usefulness and profit. By its public witness of respect for women, and its defence of the innate dignity of every human person, the Church in the Holy Land can make an important contribution to the advancement of a culture of true humanity and the building of the civilization of love.

Dear friends, let us return to the words of Jesus in today's Gospel. I believe that they contain a special message for you, his faithful flock in these lands where he once dwelt. "The good shepherd", he tells us, "lays down his life for his sheep." At the beginning of this Mass, we asked the Father to "give us new strength from the courage of Christ our shepherd", who remained steadfast in fidelity to the Father's will (cf. *Opening Prayer*, Mass of the Fourth Sunday of Easter). May the courage of Christ our shepherd inspire and sustain you daily in your efforts to bear witness to the Christian faith and to maintain the Church's presence in the changing social fabric of these ancient lands.

Fidelity to your Christian roots, fidelity to the Church's mission in the Holy Land, demands of each of you a particular kind of courage: the courage of conviction, born of personal faith, not mere social convention or family tradition; the courage to engage in dialogue and to work side by side with other Christians in the service of the Gospel and solidarity with the poor, the displaced, and the victims of profound human tragedies; the courage to build new bridges to enable a fruitful encounter of people of different religions and cultures, and thus to enrich the fabric of society. It also means bearing witness to the love which inspires us to "lay down" our lives in the service of others, and thus to counter ways of thinking which justify "taking" innocent lives.

"I am the good shepherd; I know my own, and my own know me" (*Jn* 10:14). Rejoice that the Lord has made you members of his flock and knows each of you by name! Follow him with joy and let him guide you in all your ways. Jesus knows what challenges you face, what trials you endure, and the good that you do in his name. Trust in him, in his enduring love for all the members of his flock, and persevere in your witness to the triumph of his love. May Saint John the Baptist, the patron of Jordan, and Mary, Virgin and Mother, sustain you by their example and prayers, and lead you to the fullness of joy in the eternal pastures where we will experience for ever the presence of the Good Shepherd and know for ever the depths of his love. Amen.

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