



JOHN PAUL II

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO GREAT BRITAIN

Address Of John Paul II To The Religious Men And Women Of England And Wales, Saturday, 29 May 1982

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,
1. I Wish to express my special joy at this meeting. You are here in such large numbers as representatives of all the religious of England and Wales.

On the eve of Pentecost you are here to renew your religious vows. With the Pope, the Successor of Peter, you will proclaim before the whole Church that you believe in your consecration; that it is your call to follow Christ that inspires your joy and your peace. "Rejoice in the Lord always" (Phil. 4, 4).

2. You worthily continue a tradition that goes back to the dawn of English Christian history. Augustine and his companions were Benedictine monks. The great monastic foundations of Anglo-Saxon and mediaeval times were not just the staging posts for evangelization; they were also the centres of learning and the seedbeds of culture and civilization. Places such as Canterbury, Jarrow, Glastonbury and St Albans are indicative of the role monasticism played in English history. Men like Bede of Jarrow, Boniface of Devon who became the Apostle of the Germans, and Dunstan of Glastonbury who became Archbishop of Canterbury in 960; women such as Hilda of Whitby, Walburga and Lioba, and many others – these are famous names in English history. Nor can we forget Anselm, or Nicholas Breakspear, born at Abbots Langley, who became Pope Adrian IV in 1154.

In Norman times this army of Christ reached new splendour with the foundation of monasteries of Cistercians, Dominicans, Franciscans, Carmelites and Augustinians.

Later, religious life suffered greatly. English religious communities were scattered and destroyed, or fled

to foreign lands. It is impossible here to name all the men and women religious of this period who followed our Lord to the point of giving their lives in defence of their faith. To that unhappy age belonged also an extraordinary Yorkshire woman, Mary Ward, who became a pioneer of the active unenclosed congregations for women.

The last century saw an amazing rebirth of religious life. Hundreds of religious houses, schools, orphanages, hospitals and other social services were established. Missionary congregations spread the faith in distant lands.

In our own time the Second Vatican Council has addressed to you a call for appropriate renewal of religious life through a return to the original charism of each institute and through a healthy adaptation to meet the changed conditions of the times (Cfr. *Perfectae Caritatis*, 2).

3. My brothers and sisters, we can see what the Church, and indeed society at large, expects from you today. The people of our time look to you and repeat what the Greek-speaking visitors to Jerusalem said to the Apostle Philip: "We wish to see Jesus" (Io. 12, 21). Yes, in you the world wishes to see Jesus. Your public profession of the evangelical counsels is a radical response to the Lord's call to follow him. As a result, your lives are meant to offer a clear witness to the reality of the Kingdom of God already present in the affairs of men and nations.

As you renew your religious consecration here this morning before God and the Church, in the sight of millions of your fellow countrymen, I wish to meditate with you on the greatness and dignity of your calling.

4. To most people you are known for what you do. Visitors to your abbeys and religious houses see you celebrate the liturgy, or follow you in prayer and

contemplation. People of all ages and conditions benefit directly from your many different services to ecclesial and civil society. You teach; you care for the sick; you look after the poor, the old, the handicapped; you bring the word of God to those near and far; you lead the young to human and Christian maturity.

5. Most people know what you do, and admire and appreciate you for it. Your true greatness, though, comes from what you are. Perhaps what you are is less known and understood. In fact, what you are can only be grasped in the light of the “newness of life” revealed by the Risen Lord. In Christ you are a “new creation” (Cfr. 2 Cor. 5, 17).

At some time in your lives, the call of the Lord to a special intimacy and union with him in his redemptive mission became so clear that you overcame your hesitations. You put aside your doubts and difficulties and committed yourselves to a life of total fidelity to the highest ideals of the Gospel. Your free decision was sustained by grace, and your perseverance through the years is a magnificent testimony of the victory of grace over the forces that struggle to tarnish the newness of your life in Christ. This “newness of life” is a gift of Christ to his Church. It is a proof of the Church’s holiness, an expression of her vitality.

6. Through the profession of the evangelical counsels you are bound to the Church in a special way (Cfr. *Lumen Gentium*, 44). Let me suggest to you, then, some of the aspects of your consecrated life that are especially significant in the present circumstances of the pilgrim People of God. Today there exists a widespread temptation to unbelief and despair. You, on the other hand are committed to being men and women of deep faith and unceasing prayer. To you in a particular way be addressed Saint Paul’s exhortation to Timothy: “Fight the good fight of the faith: take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses” (1 Tim. 6, 12). Believe in the Risen Lord. Believe in your own personal vocation. Believe that Christ called you because he loves you. In moments of darkness and pain, believe that he loves you all the more. Believe in the specific inspiration and charism of your Institute. Believe in your mission within the Church. Let your faith shine

before the world, as a lamp in the darkness; let it shine as a beacon that will guide a confused society to the proper appreciation of essential values. May the spiritual joy of your personal lives, and your communal witness of authentic Christian love, be a source of inspiration and hope. Let your consecration be known. Be recognizable as religious men and women. The secular city needs living witnesses such as you.

7. Today many people are tempted to live by a false set of values. You, on the other hand, are men and women who have discovered the pearl of great price (Cfr. Matth. 13, 46), a treasure that does not fail (Cfr. Luc. 12, 22–34). Through poverty voluntarily embraced in imitation of Christ – being poor in spirit and in fact, singly and corporately (Cfr. *Perfectae Caritatis*, 13) – you seek freedom from the tyranny of the consumer society. Chastity practised “for the sake of the kingdom of heaven” (Matth. 19, 12) is a special gift to you from Christ, and from you to the whole Church. Virginity or celibacy is not only a preferential love of the Lord, but also a freedom for a total self-giving in universal service, without conditions and without discrimination. Your chastity, when it is marked by genuine generosity and joy, teaches others to distinguish between true love and its many counterfeits. Through your obedience, which is a complete dedication of yourselves to the will of God, you seek to achieve the “mature measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4, 13). Paradoxically, through self-renunciation, you grow to human and Christian maturity and responsibility. You show that many current ideas of freedom are in fact distorted. You help ransom society, as it were, from the effects of unbridled selfishness.

8. The witness of religious consecration has a special dimension for those of you who live the contemplative form of religious life. Your lives are hidden with Christ in God. In silence and through prayer and penance you praise him. You call down his graces and blessings upon God’s people (Cfr. *Perfectae Caritatis*, 7). Many people have a vague idea of what you do, but very many more, including Catholics, fail to recognize the greatness of your special vocation and its irreplaceable role in the Church’s life. Contemplative life imparts to God’s people “a hidden apostolic fruitfulness” (Ibid.).

Contemplative prayer sustains the Church in her struggle to bring mankind to a proper understanding of human dignity and spiritual values. In the name of the Church I thank you. I ask you to pray all the more for the pilgrim People of God and for the world. And to those who feel called to the contemplative life, I repeat Jesus' invitation to two hesitant disciples: "Come and see". They came and saw and stayed with him (Cfr. Io. 1, 39).

9. The "hidden witness" of contemplatives is flanked by the vigorous apostolic thrust of the active religious communities. In the footsteps of the Master, with zeal for his Father's will, and confident in your own particular charism, you "show wonderfully at work within the Church the surpassing greatness of the force of Christ the King and the boundless power of the Holy Spirit" (Lumen Gentium, 44).

Religious communities have a special responsibility to be sensitive to the signs of the times, and to try to meet such needs as are the proper concern of the Church's ministry. Imitate the faith and courage of your founders. Be ready to sacrifice yourselves as they did. Help the Bishops in their pastoral ministry, with confidence in Christ's promise to protect and guide his Church.

10. Men and women religious, lift up your hearts! Give thanks to the Lord for your wonderful vocation. Through you Jesus wants to continue his prayer of contemplation on the mountain. He wants to be seen announcing God's Kingdom, healing the sick, bringing sinners to conversion, blessing children, doing good to all and always obeying the will of the Father who sent him (Cfr. Lumen Gentium, 46). In you the Church and the world must be able to see the living Lord. Do not be afraid to proclaim openly before the rest of the Church, especially the young, the worthwhileness of your way of life and its beauty. The Catholic community must be shown the high privilege of following Christ's call to the religious life. The young must come to know you more closely. They will come to you when they see you as generous and cheerful followers of Jesus Christ, whose way of life does not offer material rewards and accommodate itself to the standards of the world. They will be attracted by Christ's uncompromising, exciting challenge to leave all in order to follow him.

11. In concluding, I wish to greet the Religious of the Anglican Communion who are present here. You too are inspired by the evangelical call to an ever closer following of Christ. You have expressed a desire to welcome the Pope and to hear him speak. I thank you. I commend to your prayers the ardent desire of millions of Christians throughout the world: that we may be fully one in faith and love.

To all of you I express my gratitude and respect. I entrust all the Religious of England and Wales to the loving protection of Mary, Mother of the Church, the loftiest example of discipleship. May the Holy Spirit fill your hearts with his gifts. Rejoice in the Lord always! Again, I say, rejoice! May the public renewal of your religious vows help bring about a new Pentecost in your lives and in the Church in this land.

Praise be Jesus Christ!

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