



JOHN PAUL II

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO GREAT BRITAIN

Holy Mass For The Renewal Of The Baptismal Promises Homily Of John Paul II, Wembley, Saturday, 29 May 1982

1. After the Ascension the Apostles went back to the Upper Room, where Jesus had instituted the Eucharist and where he had declared that the law of love is the first and most essential of his commandments. And there they “joined in continuous prayer, together with several women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers” (Act. 1, 14).

This evening we have gathered here in a similar spiritual atmosphere. On the eve of Pentecost I am celebrating this Mass with you. Together we shall renew our baptismal promises as an offering of ourselves to our heavenly Father, joined to the sacrificial offering of Christ in the Eucharist. Let us reflect together on the word of God. The Apostles in the Upper Room were afraid. They prayed. And we too pray, for we are beset by fears and weaknesses: “We groan inwardly as we wait for our bodies to be set free”; we too wait in patience for the Spirit to come to help us in our weakness (Cfr. Rom. 8, 22–26).

Unfortunately not all of the Lord’s disciples are fully united in faith and charity. This is one of the reasons why I have come to Britain, and why I have made a pilgrimage today to the Cathedral of Canterbury. But I have come above all to make a pastoral visit to the Catholic community; to visit the Church that is in England and Wales; to renew with you our shared love and enthusiasm for the Gospel of Jesus Christ; to confirm you in your faith and to share your joys and your hopes, your grieves and your anxieties.

2. As I look at this great assembly I am full of respect for each of you. You are God’s sons and daughters; he loves you. I believe in you. I believe in all mankind. I believe in the unique dignity of every human being. I

believe that each individual has a value that can never be ignored or taken away.

Yet I also know that often, too often, human dignity and human rights are not respected. Man is set against man, class against class, in useless conflicts. Immigrants, people of a different colour, religion or culture suffer discrimination and hostility. The heart of man is restless and troubled. Man conquers space but is unsure about himself; he is confused about the direction in which he is heading. It is tragic that our technological mastery is greater than our wisdom about ourselves. All this must be changed. “O Lord, the earth is full of your creatures . . . When you send forth your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth” (Ps. 104, 24. 30). Let this be our plea. May we be renewed in the depths of our hearts in the power of the Holy Spirit.

3. Together we shall renew our baptismal promises. We shall reject sin, and the glamour of evil, and Satan, the father of sin and prince of darkness. We shall profess our faith in the One God, in his Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, in the coming of the Holy Spirit, in the Church, in life everlasting. And we shall be responsible for the words we say, and be bound by an alliance with our God.

4. Brothers and sisters! In order to be faithful to this alliance we must be a people of prayer and deep spirituality. Our society needs to recover a sense of God’s loving presence, and a renewed sense of respect for his will.

Let us learn this from Mary our Mother. In England, “the Dowry of Mary”, the faithful, for centuries, have made pilgrimage to her shrine at Walsingham. Today Walsingham comes to Wembley, and the statue of Our Lady of Walsingham, present here, lifts our minds to meditate on our Mother. She obeyed the will

of God fearlessly and gave birth to the Son of God by the power of the Holy Spirit. Faithful at the foot of the Cross, she then waited in prayer for the Holy Spirit to descend on the infant Church. It is Mary who will teach us how to be silent, how to listen for the voice of God in the midst of a busy and noisy world. It is Mary who will help us to find time for prayer. Through the Rosary, that great Gospel prayer, she will help us to know Christ. We need to live as she did, in the presence of God, raising our minds and hearts to him in our daily activities and worries. May your homes become schools of prayer for both parents and children. God should be the living hearth of your family life. Keep Sunday holy. Go to Mass every Sunday. At Mass the People of God gather together in unity around the altar to worship and to intercede. At Mass you exercise the great privilege of your Baptism: to praise God in union with Christ his Son; to praise God in union with his Church. It is particularly important for you to be united with your Bishops. They are the successors of the Apostles; they are the guardians and teachers of the true faith. Love and respect them and pray for them; they have been given the task of leading you to Christ.

And you, my dear brothers in the ministry of the priesthood, you have a special responsibility. You must build up the Body of Christ. You have to encourage the laity in their particular vocation in society. You have to help them to “put on Christ”. You have to support them in their Christian lives and challenge them to ever greater holiness. Open for your people the treasures of the Church’s liturgy. Celebrate the Mass with understanding, with reverence and with love. Continue to teach the importance of frequent Communion. Encourage regular Confession. It is a sacrament of enduring power and importance. Develop in your parishes an atmosphere and a practice of fervent prayer and community life.

5. Brothers and sisters, to be faithful to our alliance with God we must be, not only a people that prays, but also a people that does the will of the heavenly Father. Again it is Mary who teaches us how. Through her obedience she accepted the whole of God’s plan for her life. And in doing so she achieved greatness. “Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her from the Lord” (Luc. 1, 45).

We express our real acceptance of Christ’s word by respecting the moral demands of our Christian vocation. And the fulfilment of these demands is an act of loving obedience to the person of Jesus Christ the Incarnate Word of God. If our faith is strong, the moral demands of the Christian life – although at times they are difficult to fulfil and although they always require effort and grace – will seem neither unreasonable nor impossible. Certainly, our fidelity to the Gospel will put us at odds with the spirit of the “present age”. Yes, we are in the world, indeed as disciples of Christ we are sent into the world, but we do not belong to the world (Cfr. Io. 17, 16. 18). The conflict between certain values of the world and the values of the Gospel is an inescapable part of the Church’s life, just as it is an inescapable part of the life of each one of us. And it is here that we must draw on the “patience” which Saint Paul spoke to us about in the second reading. We groan inwardly as we await our salvation, in hope and with patience (Cfr. Rom. 8, 23–25).

6. I have often spoken of the decline of respect for the fundamental moral values that are essential to the Christian life. Indeed, moral values are essential to the life of all human beings as free agents created in the image and likeness of God, and destined to a higher creation.

The world has largely lost respect for human life from the moment of conception. It is weak in upholding the indissoluble unity of marriage. It fails to support the stability and holiness of family life.

There is a crisis of truth and responsibility in human relationship. Selfishness abounds. Sexual permissiveness and drug addiction ruin the lives of millions of human beings. International relations are fraught with tensions, often because of excessive inequalities and unjust economic, social, cultural and political structures, and because of slowness in applying the needed remedies.

Underlying all of this there is often a false concept of man and his unique dignity, and a thirst for power rather than a desire to serve.

Are we Christians to agree with such a state of affairs? Are we to call this progress? Are we to shrug our shoulders and say that nothing can be done to change all this?

My brothers and sisters, the essence of our Christian vocation consists in being “light” and “salt” for the world we live in. Let us not be afraid: “The Spirit comes to help us in our weakness” (Rom. 8, 26). Keep in mind that picture of Mary and the Apostles gathered together at Pentecost in Jerusalem. Remember that the same Holy Spirit who filled their minds and hearts also fills the whole Church today. And he brings us the loveliest and the most powerful gifts: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Gal. 5, 22). Let us really accept the words of Jesus: “If anyone thirst, let him come to me and drink” (Io. 7, 37). Then we shall receive his gift: “Out of our hearts shall flow rivers of living water . . . Now he said this about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were to receive”. Then, in the power of the Spirit we shall become a people that prays: indeed, the Spirit himself will pray in us and for us (Cfr. Rom. 8, 26). And we shall become a holy people.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, realize the greatness of your Christian vocation. Christ has called you out of darkness into his own wonderful light. Consider what God has done for you in Baptism, and lift up your eyes and see the final glory that awaits you.

“Bless the Lord, O my soul.
O Lord my God, you are very great.
O Lord how manifold are all your works.
When you send forth your Spirit, they are created,
and you renew the face of the earth” (Ps. 104, 1. 24. 30). Amen.

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