



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II *GENERAL AUDIENCE*

Wednesday 24 June 1998

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. A few days ago I made my third Pastoral Visit to Austria and now, having returned to Rome, I think back on the significant meetings I had with those dear communities. The greatest feeling in my heart is one of gratitude.

First of all, I thank God, the giver of all good things, for allowing me to have this deep spiritual experience filled with liturgical celebrations, moments of prayer and reflection, in view of a fresh springtime for the Church in that beloved country. I particularly thank my revered Brothers in the Episcopate, who in these difficult times spare no energy in their generous service of truth and charity. I encourage them in their pastoral efforts. I would also like once again to thank the Federal President and the public authorities, as well as all the citizens, who welcomed me with truly cordial hospitality.

2. With my visit I wanted to express to the Austrian people my esteem and regard, at the same time making useful observations, as the Successor of Peter, for the future of those particular Churches.

While I discussed the theme of mission in Salzburg, in Sankt Pölten I called for a reflection on the problem of vocations. Lastly, as the high point and principal theme of my journey, I had the joy of adding the names of three servants of God to the rolls of the blessed. During the moving celebration at the Heldenplatz (“Heroes’ Square”) in Vienna, I reminded everyone that Christian heroism lies in holiness.

The “Church’s heroes” are not necessarily those who have made history according to human standards, but the men and women who perhaps, in the eyes of the world, seemed unimportant, but in fact are great in the sight of God. We will look for them in vain among the ranks of the

mighty; they remain indelibly inscribed with capital letters in the “book of life”.

The biographies of the new blessed hold a message for our times. They are documents accessible to all, which people today can read and understand with ease: they speak, in fact, with the eloquent language of real life.

3. I recall with great pleasure the presence and enthusiasm of the many young people, whom I reminded that the Church regards them as the promising wealth of the future. In inviting them to bear courageous witness to Christ without compromise, I stressed what I had written in the Encyclical *Redemptoris missio*: “People today put more trust in witnesses than in teachers, in experience than in teaching, and in life and action than in theories” (n. 42).

Young people, who are naturally attracted to ideals, especially when they are embodied in life, appreciated this subject. They understood the meaning of my visit to their country: I went to Austria as a pilgrim of faith, as a co-worker of joy, as a partner of truth.

4. I must mention two rather different occasions, but both significant in their own way: the meeting with the authorities and the diplomatic corps at the Hofburg and the visit to the sick and dying at the Rennweg Hospice of Caritas Socialis. On both these occasions I spoke on the same basic theme from different angles: the essential duty of respect for the image of God inscribed in every human being. This is one of the key points in the message I wanted to bring not only to Catholics but to all the inhabitants of Austria.

Every person, in any phase of life, has inalienable value. The address on “the culture of life” aimed at the architects of the European House, becomes a reality, among other things, in institutions such as the Hospice, where the “Gospel of suffering”, read in the light of faith, is rewritten day after day.

Present at the side of all who tirelessly serve in hospitals and nursing homes, present as well at the side of those who do not abandon their seriously ill relatives, is the Lord who recognizes their loving care as being given to him. The sick, with the burden of their sufferings born for the love of Christ, are a precious treasure for the Church and are highly effective collaborators in her work of evangelization.

5. Thinking back to the intense emotions I experienced, I feel the need to repeat what I said at the end of my visit: *Credo in vitam!* I believe in life. I believe that the Church in Austria is alive. I believe that this life is stronger than the trials which many of the faithful in that beloved country have gone through and are going through. I went among them to help them overcome the difficulties of the moment and to encourage them generously to continue their journey to the Great Jubilee.

Even in Rome the Pope's heart still beats for Austria. In Christ's words I say again to everyone: "Let not your hearts be troubled!" (Jn 14:1). Do not only look at the past! Prepare the future with the help of the Holy Spirit! My Pastoral Visit to Austria has ended; now begins a new stage in the pilgrimage that will lead the People of God in Austria to cross the threshold of the new millennium to proclaim, together with the Bishops, the good news of Christ to the generations to come.

"Vergelt's Gott!" — thank you for everything. God reward you.

To the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors the Holy Father said:

I warmly greet the group of publishers and television network executives from the United States of America who are attending a Conference on Religion and the Mass Media in preparation for the Year 2000. I extend a special welcome to the group taking part in the course on Parish Renewal sponsored by the Movement for a Better World, as well as the group of Provincial Superiors of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. Upon all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors, especially those from England, Scotland, Norway, Swaziland, Sri Lanka, Singapore, the Philippines and the United States of America, I invoke the grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ.
