



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

HOLY MASS ON BOSTON COMMON

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Boston

Monday, 1st October 1979

Dear brothers and sisters, dear young people of America,

1. Earlier today, I set foot on the soil of the United States of America. In the name of Christ I begin a pastoral journey that will take me to several of your cities. At the beginning of this year, I had the occasion to greet this continent and its people from a place where Christopher Columbus landed; today I stand at this gateway to the United States, and again I greet all of America. For its people, wherever they are, have a special place in the love of the Pope.

I come to the United States of America as Successor of Peter and as a pilgrim of faith. It gives me great joy to be able to make this visit. And so, my esteem and affection go out to all the people of this land. I greet all Americans without distinction; I want to meet you and tell you all—men and women of all creeds and ethnic origins, children and youth, fathers and mothers, the sick and the elderly—that God loves you, that he has given you a dignity as human beings that is beyond compare. I want to tell everyone that the Pope is your friend and a servant of your humanity. On this first day of my visit, I wish to express my esteem and love for America itself, for the experience that began two centuries ago and that carries the name "United States of America" ; for the past achievements of this land and for its dedication to a more just and human future; for the generosity with which this country has offered shelter, freedom and a chance for betterment to all who have come to its shores ; and for the human solidarity that impels you to collaborate with all other nations so that freedom may be safeguarded and full human advancement made possible. I greet you, America the beautiful!

2. I am here because I wanted to respond to the invitation which the Secretary-General of the United Nations Organization first addressed to me. Tomorrow I shall have the honor, as guest of the United Nations, to go to this supreme international forum of nations, and to deliver an address to the General Assembly: to make a plea to the whole world for justice and peace—a plea in defense of the unique dignity of every human being. I feel highly honored by the invitation of the United Nations Secretary-General. At the same time I am conscious of the greatness and importance of the challenge that this invitation brings with it. I have been convinced from the very first that this invitation by the United Nations should be accepted by me *as Bishop of Rome and pastor of the universal Church* of Christ. And so, I express my deep gratitude also to the Hierarchy of the Church in the United States, who joined in the initiative of the United Nations. I have received many invitations from individual dioceses, and from different regions of this country, as well as from Canada. I deeply regret that I am unable to accept all the invitations ; I would willingly make a pastoral visit everywhere, if it were possible. [My pilgrimage to Ireland](#) on the occasion of the centenary of the Shrine of Our Lady at Knock constituted a fitting introduction to my visit with you. I sincerely hope that my whole visit in the United States will be seen in the light of the Second Vatican Council's Constitution on the Church in the Modern World.

And tonight I am deeply pleased to be with you on Boston Common. In you I greet the City of Boston and all its people, as well as the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and all its civil authorities. With special warmth, I greet here Cardinal Medeiros and the whole Archdiocese of Boston. A special remembrance links me with the City, for three years ago, at the invitation of its Divinity School, I had the opportunity to speak at the University of Harvard. As I recall this memorable event, I wish to express once again my gratitude to the authorities of Harvard and to the Dean of the Divinity School for that exceptionally valuable opportunity.

3. During my first visit in the United States as Pope, on the eve of my visit to the United Nations Organization, I now wish to speak a special word to the young people that are gathered here.

Tonight, in a very special way, I hold out my hands to the youth of America. [In Mexico City and Guadalajara](#) I met the youth of Latin America. [In Warsaw and Cracow](#) I met the youth of Poland. In Rome I meet frequently groups of young people from Italy and from all over the world. Yesterday I met [the youth of Ireland in Galway](#). And now with great joy I meet you. For me, each one of these meetings is a new discovery. Again and again I find in young people the joy and enthusiasm of life, a searching for truth and for the deeper meaning of the existence that unfolds before them in all its attraction and potential.

4. Tonight, I want to repeat what I keep telling youth : you are the future of the world, and "the day of tomorrow belongs to you". I want to remind you of the encounters that Jesus himself had with the youth of his day. The Gospels preserve for us a striking account of a conversation Jesus had with a young man. We read there that the young man put to Christ one of the fundamental questions that youth everywhere ask: "What must I do ...?" (*Mk 10 :17*), and he received a precise

and penetrating answer. "Then, Jesus looked at him with love and told him ... Come and follow me" (*Mk 10 :21*). But see what happens : the young man, who had shown such interest in the fundamental question, "went away sad, for he had many possessions" (*Mk 10 :22*). Yes, he went away, and—as can be deduced from the context—he refused to accept the call of Christ.

This deeply penetrating event, in its concise eloquence, expresses a great lesson in a few words: it touches upon substantial problems and basic questions that have in no way lost their relevance. Everywhere young people are asking important questions—questions on the meaning of life, on the right way to live, on the true scale of values: "What must I do...?" "What must I do to share in everlasting life?" This questioning bears witness to your thoughts, your consciences, your hearts and wills. This questioning tells the world that you, young people, carry within yourselves a special openness with regard to what is good and what is true. This openness is, in a sense, a "revelation" of the human spirit. And in this openness to truth, to goodness and to beauty, each one of you can find yourself ; indeed, in this openness you can all experience in some measure what the young man in the Gospel experienced : "Jesus looked at him with love" (*Mk 10 :21*).

5. To each one of you I say therefore: heed the call of Christ when you hear him saying to you: "Follow me !" Walk in my path ! Stand by my side ! Remain in my love ! There is a choice to be made : a choice for Christ and his way of life, and his commandment of love.

The message of love that Christ brought is always important, always relevant. It is not difficult to see how today's world, despite its beauty and grandeur, despite the conquests of science and technology, despite the refined and abundant material goods that it offers, is yearning for more truth, for more love, for more joy. And all of this is found in Christ and in his way of life.

Do I then make a mistake when I tell you, Catholic youth, that it is part of your task in the world and the Church to reveal the true meaning of life where hatred, neglect or selfishness threaten to take over the world? Faced with problems and disappointments, many people will try to escape from their responsibility : escape in selfishness, escape in sexual pleasure, escape in drugs, escape in violence, escape in indifference and cynical attitudes. But today, I propose to you the option of love, which is the opposite of escape. If you really accept that love from Christ, it will lead you to God. Perhaps in the priesthood or religious life; perhaps in some special service to your brothers and sisters: especially to the needy, the poor, the lonely, the abandoned, those whose rights have been trampled upon, or those whose basic needs have not been provided for. Whatever you make of your life, let it be something that reflects the love of Christ. The whole People of God will be all the richer because of the diversity of your commitments. In whatever you do, remember that Christ is calling you, in one way or another, to the service of love: the love of God and of your neighbor.

6. And now coming back to the story of the young man in the Gospels, we see that he heard the call—"Follow me"—but that he "went away sad, for he had many possessions".

The sadness of the young man makes us reflect. We could be tempted to think that many possessions, many of the goods of this world, can bring happiness. We see instead in the case of the young man in the Gospel that his many possessions had become an obstacle to accepting the call of Jesus to follow him. He was not ready to say *yes* to Jesus, and *no* to self, to say *yes* to love and *no* to escape.

Real love is demanding. I would fail in my mission if I did not clearly tell you so. For it was Jesus—our Jesus himself—who said : "You are my friends if you do what I command you" (*Jn* 15 :14). Love demands effort and a personal commitment to the will of God. It means discipline and sacrifice, but it also means joy and human fulfillment.

Dear young people : do not be afraid of honest effort and honest work; do not be afraid of the truth. With Christ's help, and through prayer, you can answer his call, resisting temptations and fads, and every form of mass manipulation. Open your hearts to the Christ of the Gospels—to his love and his truth and his joy. Do not go away sad!

And, as a last word to all of you who listen to me tonight, I would say this : the reason for my mission, for my journey, through the United States is to tell you, to tell everyone—young and old alike—to say to everyone in the name of Christ: "Come and follow me !"

Follow Christ! You who are married: share your love and your burdens with each other; respect the human dignity of your spouse; accept joyfully the life that God gives through you; make your marriage stable and secure for your children's sake.

Follow Christ! You who are single or who are preparing for marriage. Follow Christ! You who are young or old. Follow Christ ! You who are sick or aging ; who are suffering or in pain. You who feel the need for healing, the need for love, the need for a friend—follow Christ!

To all of you I extend—in the name of Christ—the call, the invitation, the plea : "Come and follow me". This is why I have come to America, and why I have come to Boston tonight: to call you to Christ—to call all of you and each of you to live in his love, today and forever. Amen !

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