



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

HOLY MASS AT THE LOGAN CIRCLE

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Philadelphia

Wednesday, 3 October 1979

Dear brothers and sisters of the Church in Philadelphia,

1. It is a great joy for me to celebrate the Eucharist with you today. All of us are gathered together as one community, one people in the grace and peace of God our Father and of the Lord Jesus Christ; we are gathered in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. We have come together to proclaim the Gospel in all its power, for the Eucharistic Sacrifice is the summit and enactment of our proclamation : Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again!

From this altar of Sacrifice, there arises a hymn of praise and thanksgiving to God through Jesus Christ. We who belong to Christ are all part of this hymn, this Sacrifice of praise. The Sacrifice of Calvary is renewed on this altar, and it becomes our offering too—an offering for the benefit of the living and the dead, an offering for the universal Church.

Assembled in the charity of Christ, we are all one in his Sacrifice: the Cardinal Archbishop who is called to lead this Church in the path of truth and love; his Auxiliary Bishops and the diocesan and religious clergy, who share with the Bishops in the preaching of the word; men and women religious, who through the consecration of their lives show the world what it means to be faithful to the message of the Beatitudes; fathers and mothers, with their great mission of building up the Church in love; every category of the laity with their particular task in the Church's mission of evangelization and salvation. This Sacrifice offered today in Philadelphia is the expression of our praying community. In union with Jesus Christ we make intercession for the universal Church, for

the well-being of all our fellow men and women, and today, in particular, for the preservation of all the human and Christian values that are the heritage of this land, this country and this very city.

2. Philadelphia is the city of the Declaration of Independence, that remarkable document, containing a solemn attestation of the equality of all human beings, endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights : life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, expressing a "firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence". These are the sound moral principles formulated by your Founding Fathers and enshrined forever in your history. In the human and civil values that are contained in the spirit of this Declaration there are easily recognized strong connections with basic religious and Christian values. A sense of religion itself is part of this heritage. The Liberty Bell which I visited on another occasion proudly bears the words of the Bible: "Proclaim liberty throughout the land" (*Lev 25 :10*). This tradition poses for all future generations of America a noble challenge: "One Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all".

3. As citizens, you must strive to preserve these human values, to understand them better and to define their consequences for the whole community, and as a worthy contribution to the world. As Christians, you must strengthen these human values and complement them by confronting them with the Gospel message, so that you may discover their deeper meaning, and thus assume more fully your duties and obligations toward your fellow human beings, with whom you are bound in a common destiny. In a way, for us, who know Jesus Christ, human and Christian values are but two aspects of the same reality : the reality of man, redeemed by Christ and called to the fullness of eternal life.

In my first [Encyclical Letter](#), I stated this important truth : "Christ, the Redeemer of the world, is the one who penetrated in a unique unrepeatable way into the mystery of man and entered his 'heart'. Rightly therefore does the Second Vatican Council teach: 'The truth is that only in the mystery of the Incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. For Adam, the first man, was a type of him who was to come (*Rom 5 :14*), Christ the Lord. Christ, the new Adam, in the very revelation of the mystery of the Father and his love, fully reveals man to himself and brings to light his most high calling" (*Redemptor Hominis*, 8). It is then in Jesus Christ that every man, woman and child is called to find the answer to the questions regarding the values that will inspire his or her personal and social relations.

4. How then can a Christian, inspired and guided by the mystery of the Incarnation and Redemption of Christ, strengthen his or her own values and those that are embodied in the heritage of this nation? The answer to that question, in order to be complete, would have to be long. Let me, however, just touch upon a few important points. These values are strengthened: when power and authority are exercised in full respect for all the fundamental rights of the human person, whose dignity is the dignity of one created in the image and likeness of God (cf. *Gen 1 :26*) ; when freedom is accepted, not as an absolute end in itself, but as a gift that enables self-giving and service; when the family is protected and strengthened, when its unity is preserved, and

when its role as the basic cell of society is recognized and honored. Human-Christian values are fostered when every effort is made so that no child anywhere in the world faces death because of lack of food, or faces a diminished intellectual and physical potential for want of sufficient nourishment, or has to bear all through life the scars of deprivation. Human-Christian values triumph when any system is reformed that authorizes the exploitation of any human being; when upright service and honesty in public servants is promoted; when the dispensing of justice is fair and the same for all; when responsible use is made of the material and energy resources of the world—resources that are meant for the benefit of all ; when the environment is preserved intact for the future generations. Human-Christian values triumph by subjecting political and economic considerations to human dignity, by making them serve the cause of man—every person created by God, every brother and sister redeemed by Christ.

5. I have mentioned the Declaration of Independence and the Liberty Bell, two monuments that exemplify the spirit of freedom on which this country was founded. Your attachment to liberty, to freedom, is part of your heritage. When the Liberty Bell rang for the first time in 1776, it was to announce the freedom of your nation, the beginning of the pursuit of a common destiny independent of any outside coercion. This principle of freedom is paramount in the political and social order, in relationships between the government and the people, and between individual and individual. However, man's life is also lived in another order of reality : in the order of his relationship to what is objectively true and morally good. Freedom thus acquires a deeper meaning when it is referred to the human person. It concerns in the first place the relation of man to himself. Every human person, endowed with reason, is free when he is the master of his own actions, when he is capable of choosing that good which is in conformity with reason, and therefore with his own human dignity.

Freedom can never tolerate an offense against the rights of others, and one of the fundamental rights of man is the right to worship God. In the [Declaration on Religious Freedom](#), the Second Vatican Council stated that the "demand for freedom in human society chiefly regards the quest for the values proper to the human spirit. It regards, in the first place, the free exercise of religion in society ... Religious freedom, which men demand as necessary to fulfill their duty to worship God, has to do with immunity from coercion in civil society. Therefore it leaves untouched traditional Catholic teaching on the moral duty of men and societies toward the true religion and toward the one Church of Christ" ([Dignitatis Humanae](#), 1).

6. Christ himself linked freedom with the knowledge of truth : "You will know the truth and the truth will make you free" (*Jn* 8 :32). In my first [Encyclical](#) I wrote in this regard : "These words contain both a fundamental requirement and a warning : the requirement of an honest relationship with regard to truth as a condition for authentic freedom, and the warning to avoid every kind of illusory freedom, every superficial unilateral freedom, every freedom that fails to enter into the whole truth about man and the world" ([Redemptor Hominis](#), 12).

Freedom can therefore never be construed without relation to the truth as revealed by Jesus Christ, and proposed by his Church, nor can it be seen as a pretext for moral anarchy, for every moral order must remain linked to truth. Saint Peter, in his first letter, says : "Live as free men, but do not use your freedom for malice" (*1 Pt 2 :16*). No freedom can exist when it goes against man in what he is, or against man in his relationship to others and to God.

This is especially relevant when one considers the domain of human sexuality. Here, as in any other field, there can be no true freedom without respect for the truth regarding the nature of human sexuality and marriage. In today's society, we see so many disturbing tendencies and so much laxity regarding the Christian view on sexuality that have all one thing in common: recourse to the concept of freedom to justify any behavior that is no longer consonant with the true moral order and the teaching of the Church. Moral norms do not militate against the freedom of the person or the couple; on the contrary they exist precisely for that freedom, since they are given to ensure the right use of freedom. Whoever refuses to accept these norms and to act accordingly, whoever seeks to liberate himself or herself from these norms, is not truly free. Free indeed is the person who models his or her behavior in a responsible way according to the exigencies of the objective good. What I have said here regards the whole of conjugal morality, but it applies as well to the priests with regard to the obligations of celibacy. The cohesion of freedom and ethics has also its consequences for the pursuit of the common good in society and for the national independence which the Liberty Bell announced two centuries ago.

7. Divine law is the sole standard of human liberty and is given to us in the Gospel of Christ, the Gospel of Redemption. But fidelity to this Gospel of Redemption will never be possible without the action of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who guards the life-giving message entrusted to the Church. It is the Holy Spirit who ensures the faithful transmission of the Gospel into the lives of all of us. It is by the action of the Holy Spirit that the Church is built up day after day into a kingdom: a kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a universal kingdom of justice, love and peace.

Today, therefore, we come before the Father to offer him the petitions and desires of our hearts, to offer him praise and thanksgiving. We do this from the City of Philadelphia for the universal Church and for the world. We do this as "members of the household of God" (*Eph 2 :19*) in union with the Sacrifice of Christ Jesus, our cornerstone, for the glory of the Most Holy Trinity. Amen.

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