



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO CANADA

(SEPTEMBER 9-20, 1984) **MASS DEDICATED TO THE HEART OF CHRIST** *HOMILY OF POPE JOHN PAUL*

//Abbotsford Airport (Vancouver)

Tuesday, 18 September 1984 "My soul, give thanks to the Lord, all my being, bless his holy name" (Ps. 103 (102), 1).1.

With these words of today's liturgy, dear brothers and sisters, I wish to address myself, together with all of you, to the God of Love. And I wish to do so through the mystery of the Heart of Christ. I choose these words because they speak of our human heart - what the Psalm refers to as "all my being". It is precisely this that we have in mind when we speak of the "heart": our whole being, all that is within each one of us. All that forms us from within, in the depths of our being. All that makes up our entire humanity, our whole person in its spiritual and physical dimension. All that expresses itself as a unique and unrepeatable person in its "inner self" and at the same time in its "transcendence". The words of the Psalm - "My soul give thanks to the Lord, all my being bless his holy name" - say that our human "heart" addresses God in all the unimaginable majesty of his divinity and his holiness and, at the same time, in his wonderful "openness" to mankind: in his "condescension". In this way "heart" meets "Heart"; "heart" speaks to the "Heart".² In this spirit I wish also to greet all those taking part in our Eucharistic assembly - in this Votive Mass of the Sacred Heart - as well as all those who have come to express their good will and their respectful solidarity with this praying community. I am deeply pleased that my visit to Canada has taken me to the City of Vancouver and this gathering place of God's people. The city is indeed marvellously located between the mountains and the ocean, being the largest city of your Province, all of which is truly a land of splendour without diminishment: *Splendor sine occasu!* The importance of your Province is certainly reflected in its forests, minerals, water, fruit and fishing, and in the beauty which attracts so many tourists. Of greater importance still are you, the people of this region. It is here that you live and work, striving to build a suitable human habitat and a just society. It is here that you struggle to solve the social problems that have become so much a part of the fabric of life in these parts. It is here that you continue your search for God and for the full meaning of human life, amid the struggle between good and evil. And to all of you today I offer the expression of my deep respect and fraternal love. In particular I wish to greet all the Catholic faithful of the Archdiocese of Vancouver, under the leadership of Archbishop Carney. I am likewise deeply grateful for all who have made great efforts to come from other dioceses of British Columbia, Victoria, Kamloops, Nelson, Prince George, the Eparchy of New Westminster under the leadership of Bishop Chimy and the Pacific Northwest. And probably also from the United States. In the unity of the Eucharist I express my deep affection for all my brother bishops and for all the clergy, religious and laity of the Catholic Church. In the charity of Christ I embrace all my fellow Christians who honour me by their presence today. I recall with sincere appreciation and respect the zealous efforts made last year in this city by the World Council of Churches to proclaim Jesus Christ to the world. With fraternal esteem I also offer my warm greetings to the members of non-Christian religions and to all the citizens of this land who have no religious affiliation. Before all of you I attest to the Catholic Church's deep interest and concern for the

incomparable human dignity of every man, woman and child on this earth. I am deeply grateful for the hospitality extended to me and for the invitation to celebrate this Eucharist. And it is in this context of public worship that I have come to you to proclaim Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God; to proclaim the invisible God whom he reveals; and to proclaim the divine love that he communicates to the world in the mystery of his Sacred Heart.³ When we say "Heart of Jesus Christ", we address ourselves in faith to the whole Christological mystery: the mystery of the God-Man. This mystery is expressed in a rich and profound way by the texts of today's liturgy. These are the words of the Apostle Paul in his Letter to the Colossians: "Christ Jesus is the image of the unseen God / and the firstborn of all creation, / for in him were created / all things in heaven and on earth: / everything visible and everything invisible, / Thrones, Dominations, Sovereignities, Powers" (*Col.* 15-16). These last words refer precisely to the "invisible" beings: the creatures that have a purely spiritual nature. "All things were created through him and for him. / Before anything was created, he existed, / and he holds all things in unity" (*Ibid.* 1, 16-17).⁴ These marvellous sentences from Saint Paul's Letter come together with what is proclaimed to us today in the Prologue of Saint John's Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word: / the Word was with God / and the Word was God. / He was with God in the beginning. / Through him all things came to be, / not one thing had its being but through him. / And the world was made through him" (*Jo.* 1, 1-3, 10). Both in the text of John and in the text of Paul is contained the revealed doctrine on the Son - the Word of God - who is of the same divine substance as the Father. This is the faith we profess as we say the Creed - that profession of faith which comes from the two most ancient Councils of the universal Church, at Nicea and Constantinople: "We believe in one God, / the Father, the Almighty, / maker of heaven and earth, / of all that is, seen and unseen. / We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, / the only Son of God, / eternally begotten of the Father, / God from God, Light from Light, / true God from true God, / begotten, not made, / of one Being with the Father. / Through him all things were made". The Son is one in substance with the Father. He is God from God. At the same time, everything that is created has its divine beginning in him, as the Eternal Word. In him all things were made and in him they have their existence.⁵ This is our faith. This is the teaching of the Church about the Divinity of the Son. This Eternal Son, true God, the Word of the Father, became man. These are the words of the Gospel: "The Word was made flesh, he lived among us" (*Ibid.* 1, 14). In the Creed we profess: "For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man". Here we more directly touch upon the reality of the Heart of Jesus. For the heart is a human organ, belonging to the body, belonging to the whole structure, to the spiritual and physical makeup of man: "And the Word was made flesh". In this make-up the heart has its place as an organ. At the same time it has a meaning as the symbolic centre of the inner self, and this inner self is, by nature, spiritual. The Heart of Jesus was conceived beneath the heart of the Virgin Mother, and its earthly life ceased at the moment Jesus died on the Cross. This is testified to by the Roman soldier who pierced the side of Jesus with a lance. During the whole of Jesus' earthly life, this Heart was the centre in which was manifested, in a human way, the love of God: the love of God the Son, and, through the Son, the love of God the Father. What constitutes the greatest fruit of this love in creation? We read it in the Gospel: "He came to his own domain and his own people did not accept him. But to all who did accept him he gave power to become children of God . . ." (*Jo.* 1, 11-12). Here is the most magnificent, the most profound gift of the Heart of Jesus that we find in creation: man born of God, man adopted as a son in the Eternal Son, humanity given the power to become children of God.⁶ And therefore our human heart "transformed" in this way can say and does say to the Divine Heart what we hear in today's liturgy: "My soul, give thanks to the Lord, / and never forget all his blessings. / It is he who forgives all your guilt, / who heals every one of your ills, / who redeems your life from the grave, / who crowns you with love and compassion. / The Lord is compassion and love, / slow to anger and rich in mercy" (*Ps.* 103 (102), 2-4, 8). These are the words of the Psalm in which the Old Testament speaks of the mystery of God's love. How much more do the Gospels tell us of the divine Heart of the Son -

and indirectly of the Heart of the Father: Heart of Jesus, abode of justice and love! Heart of Jesus, patient and most merciful! Heart of Jesus, fountain of life and holiness! Finally we can repeat with Isaiah that those who hope in the divine Heart "renew their strength, they put out wings like eagles. They run and do not grow weary, walk and never tire" (Is. 40, 31). 7. Le cœur de Jésus Christ, c'est un appel de Dieu, fort et constant, adressé à l'humanité, à chaque cœur humain. Écoutons encore les paroles de Paul dans la liturgie d'aujourd'hui: "Il est aussi la tête du corps, / c'est-à-dire de l'Église. / Il est le commencement, / le premier-né d'entre les morts, / puisqu'il devait avoir en tout la primauté. / Car Dieu a voulu que, dans le Christ, / toute chose ait son accomplissement total. / Il a voulu tout réconcilier par lui et pour lui, / sur la terre et dans les cieux, / en faisant la paix par le sang de sa Croix" (Col. 1, 18-20). Voici la perspective ultime que nous ouvre le Cœur de Jésus Christ par la foi. Il est le commencement et la fin de tout ce qui a été créé en Dieu même. Il est la plénitude. Toute la création visible et invisible avance vers cette Plénitude en lui. En lui est la Plénitude où toute l'humanité est appelée, réconciliée avec Dieu par le sang de Jésus Christ versé sur la Croix. Lord Jesus Christ, / Eternal Son of the Eternal Father, / Born of the Virgin Mary, / We ask you to continue to reveal to us the mystery of God: so that we may recognize in you "the image of the invisible God"; that we may find him in you, in your divine Person, in the warmth of your humanity, in the love of your Heart. Heart of Jesus in whom dwells the fullness of Divinity! Heart of Jesus, of whose fullness we have all received! Heart of Jesus, King and centre of all hearts, for ever and ever. Amen! ©

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