



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC PILGRIMAGE TO INDIA

EUCHARISTIC CONCELEBRATION AT SHIVAJI PARK

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Bombay

Sunday, 9 February 1986

"I will put my spirit within you".

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. These words of the Prophet Ezekiel find their fulfilment in the Cenacle at Jerusalem. On the eve of his Passion, Christ says to the Apostles: "The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you: my peace I give to you".

Today we have gathered in this city of Bombay, the capital of Maharashtra State, to pray in a special way for this peace which is given by Christ, for this peace which is communicated to human hearts and human communities in the power of the Holy Spirit.

It is God who transforms human hearts, just as the Prophet Ezekiel eloquently proclaimed: "A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh" .

2. The Church never ceases to proclaim the truth that peace in the world has its roots in the human heart, in the conscience of each man and woman. Peace can only be the fruit of a spiritual change, beginning in the heart of every human being and spreading throughout communities. The first of these communities is the family. It is the family that is the first community to be called to peace, and the first community to call for peace – peace and fellowship between individuals and

peoples.

For this reason our meditation and prayer today is concentrated on the family. It is our hope that a great cry for peace and fellowship will rise from this smallest and most basic cell of society. This cry must reach all groups; it must reach the family of each nation and finally the vast family of all the nations of the world.

Here may the voice of India and the voice of the Church be joined in unison.

3. We raise this voice in the place where, some twenty years ago, Pope Paul VI was with you during the International Eucharistic Congress here in Bombay. That momentous occasion was the first time in history that a Successor of Saint Peter had visited your motherland. Towards the end of those historic days, Paul VI expressed his admiration for the people of India and of this city in the following words: "In our memory, Bombay will remain as the symbol and epitome of the great continent of Asia, with its ancient cultures and traditions, with its vast populations, with its earnest desire for peace". I give thanks to God for the privilege of following in the footsteps of my predecessor. I am pleased to have been able to travel to a number of important places in your vast country. And it is a joy for me today to be with you in Bombay. I can assure you that, when I leave, I too shall carry within my heart a vivid memory of the rich cultures and traditions of India. I shall treasure my experience of the vitality of the Church in this ancient land.

I now wish to extend a special greeting to Archbishop Pimenta, to his auxiliary bishops and to all my brother bishops of this region of India. Together with them, I greet my brother priests, the men and women religious and all the faithful people. My greetings go not only to the Christian brethren, but also to the brothers and sisters of the Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain and Parsee religions, and also to the civil and religious authorities of this place. In particular I greet the families of Bombay and of all India, and I welcome this occasion to reflect with you on the role of the Christian family in building a new world of peace.

4. "I will put my spirit within you". When two human beings, a man and a woman, approach the altar, as ministers of the Sacrament of Matrimony, the Church invokes the Creator. She asks the Holy Spirit to come down on these two who are to become husband and wife and are to begin a family.

They are to live under one roof and create a home. The home is the place where the family lives, the outward framework of that life. But at the same time there is also the inner mystery of their hearts. People not only live in a home; they also create a home. And they create it by the fact of "living" in each other's hearts: the husband in the wife and the wife in the husband, the children in the parents and the parents in the children. The parental home is the mutual indwelling of human hearts.

So in the home we see a reflection of the mystery which Christ speaks about in the Cenacle: "If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him" .

5. Today's liturgy reminds us of the most wonderful image of the community of marriage and the family that was ever written down in Sacred Scripture. It is found in the Letter to the Ephesians, in which Saint Paul says of the union of husband and wife in Christian marriage: "This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the Church". The love of husband and wife has its model in the love of Christ for the Church and reflects that love in the world. Jesus expressed his love most completely on the Cross, when he sacrificed his own life for the sake of his bride, the Church. The Holy Spirit, which each of us has received in Baptism and Confirmation, makes husbands and wives capable of loving one another with the same sacrificial love. That is why Saint Paul exhorts husbands in the following words: "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her". The love of Christ endures for ever and is constantly life-giving and fruitful. Likewise, Christian spouses are indissolubly bound to each other in a union which is intended to bring forth and nourish new life.

6. Every couple approaching the altar to become the ministers of the Sacrament of Matrimony should have this image before their eyes. In this Sacrament the Church invokes the Holy Spirit, that by his sanctifying power he may bring about in the man and woman a spousal change of heart – a change that will become a firm foundation of the marriage covenant.

This spousal change of heart is at the same time a special consecration in marriage . As the man and woman entrust themselves to each other, they consecrate to God their souls and bodies, so that from their union there may develop a mature family community, a communion of love and life.

Husbands and wives receive this communion as a gift, a gift which they have the task of deepening and broadening. Though the responsible transmission of life they gladly accept children as a sign of fruitfulness and a gift of God. With the birth of a child, which calls for greater sacrificial love, they find their own loving union deepened and widened to include others. In the words of your own Indian sage, Rabindranath Tagore, they recognize this truth:

"Every baby that is born
Brings with it the message
That God has not lost faith in mankind".

For the Second Vatican Council, responsible parenthood means that parents should "take into account both their own welfare and that of their children, those already born and those which may be foreseen. For this accounting they will reckon with both the material and spiritual conditions of the times as well as of their state in life, maintaining regard finally for the good of the family community, of temporal society and of the Church herself" . The Council goes on to say that "when

there is a question of harmonizing conjugal love with the responsible transmission of life, the moral aspect of any procedure does not depend solely on sincere intentions or on an evaluation of motives. It must be determined by objective standards. These, based on the nature of the human person and his acts, preserve the full sense of mutual self-giving and human procreation in the context of true love".

We see in the statements of Mahatma Gandhi certain similarities. While he asserted that "the act of generation should be controlled for the ordered growth of the world", he asked the question: "How is the suspension of procreation to be brought about?" And he answered: "Not by immoral and artificial checks... but by a life of discipline and self-control". And he added: "Moral results can only be produced by moral restraints". This, dear brothers and sisters, is the Church's profound conviction.

Furthermore, it is the role of the family everywhere and of all society to proclaim that all human life is sacred from the moment of conception. It is the task of all mankind to reject whatever wounds, weakens or destroys human life – whatever offends the dignity of any human being.

7. The family is called by the word of the Living God to be a community of peace and fellowship. At the same time, the family calls all individuals and all nations to be such a community.

First of all, in order to develop properly, the family needs a social atmosphere of peace and fellowship which protects its rights. In significant ways, the situation of the family in India today presents certain encouraging signs: the esteem given to mutual fidelity; the worthy efforts being made to promote the dignity of women; the care of parents for their children and the devotion of children to their parents; the attention given to the quality of interpersonal relationships in marriage and to the education of children, to mention just a few.

On the other hand, the family today is under great stress due to certain trends in modern society, accelerated development and other pressures. The family faces the risk of fragmentation and a breakdown of authority. Parents experience difficulty in passing on authentic values to their children. The rapid increase of urbanisation brings with it crowded slums, housing problems and higher rate of unemployment or under-employment – all of which have negative effects on the family.

The well-known opposition of the Church to the moral evils that affect the family and married life is due to her profound conviction that such evils are contrary to God's plan for humanity and that they violate the sacredness of marriage and the values of human life. The Church has a responsibility to defend the rights of the family and the total well-being of humanity, and it is for this reason that she renews her commitment to proclaiming the full truth about man.

8. Peace and fellowship are also necessary for the life of the local community and of larger social

groups, and of the nation itself.

The quality of a nation's life, or of the life of any community, depends on the presence or absence of peace and fellowship. Where there is an atmosphere of peace, tremendous energies for good spring up, giving people joy and creativity, helping them to grow to full maturity and to work together as sons and daughters of a loving God. Where there is true fraternal solidarity, the rights of the weak and defenceless are not violated; rather the dignity and well-being of all are safeguarded and promoted. And there can be peace only where there is justice and freedom and true respect for the nature of man.

But our modern world is all too familiar with the lack of brotherhood and with violence, tension, discrimination and injustice. The way we face these problems is a test of our humanity, a test of the quality of our communities and nations. It is a challenge which faces India and every other nation in the world.

9. The whole of humanity also makes up a family. This is the great family of man, with all its variety.

The cause of ensuring peace, international justice, and indeed the solidarity of all people throughout the world is a particular aspiration of our time. It is voiced by the leaders of nations and of international organisations. Programmes for peace are endorsed in varying degrees by nearly every political party in the world. Popular movements and public opinion support the same cause. In every country people are weary of conflict and division. The world longs for harmony and peace.

10. And therefore the Church of the twentieth century insistently calls for justice and integral human development. In episcopal conferences and local Churches, through the efforts of parishes and various associations, by teaching and by action for justice, and in many other ways, the Church works for harmony and brotherhood. Above all she counts on the contribution of Christian families to bear witness to Jesus' Gospel of fraternal love.

She does not cease to ask that humanity may be given "a new spirit", that the "heart of stone" may be replaced by a "heart of flesh"; that there may be true peace in so many centres of conflict and in the international life of our time.

For the world is the home of individuals, peoples, nations, humanity. The human race is more numerous than ever before and is achieving scientific and technical progress never before known. Hence, ethical progress, spiritual progress, fully human progress is all the more necessary. In this point, the Church's cry voices, I am sure, the sentiments of many hearts here in India.

11. At the same time, the earth – people's home – belongs to God. Today's Liturgy proclaims this in the words of the psalmist:

"Give the Lord, you families of peoples,
give the Lord glory and power,
Lord the glory of his name...
O earth, tremble before him.
Proclaim to the nations: 'God is king'.
The world he made firm in its place;
he will judge the peoples in fairness...
He comes to rule the earth.
With justice he will rule the world,
he will judge the peoples with his truth".

May this voice rising from the Church's heart, which makes itself one with the voice of India, with the cry of every family established upon the covenant with God, the Creator of life and source of love.

May this voice become ever stronger; may it not remain unanswered. Amen.

© Copyright 1986 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana