



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO JAMAICA,
MEXICO AND DENVER (COLORADO)

CELEBRATION OF LAUDS

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Cathedral of Kingston (Jamaica)

Tuesday, 10 August 1993

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

1. For a long time I have eagerly anticipated being here with all of you: *the Bishops, priests, deacons and seminarians of Kingston, Montego Bay and Mandeville; the Religious men and women* serving these local Churches; and *lay leaders* of the Catholic communities in this nation. I extend fraternal greetings as well to the other Bishops and faithful who have come to Jamaica to be a part of this gathering in the Cathedral of the Holy Trinity. My happiness today is all the greater, since my visit comes after the delay which prevented my coming last year, as had been planned. In the meantime you have never been far from my thoughts, and—to borrow the words of Saint Paul—"whenever I think of you, I thank God; and every time I pray for all of you, I pray with joy, remembering how you have helped to spread the Good News" (Cf. Phil. 1, 3:4).

2. Bearing witness to the Gospel is that "work of service" which the Apostle says *builds up the body of Christ* (Eph. 4:12). To be a witness is to be an heir to the Church's great missionary tradition, a tradition going back to the first Pentecost morning in Jerusalem and which, on this Island, is as old as the arrival of Columbus himself. In this regard I wish to pay heartfelt tribute to all who left their homelands in order to be heralds of the Good News here in Jamaica. Yes, this is the glory of missionaries: to be the instruments of Divine Providence in leading people to him who has "the words of eternal life" (Jn. 6:68). For this the faithful of the local Churches are forever in their debt and should remember them with pride.

You are the *crown* of the labours of those men and women who planted and nourished the faith on this beautiful Island. From the arrival in 1512 of the original band of ten Franciscan friars down to our own day, God's Providence has been at work through the uncertainties and changes of Jamaica's history in providing labourers for his harvest in this land: the abbots and clergy sent by the Spanish crown, the aged Father Thomas Churchill dispatched according to the orders of a Stuart king, priests fleeing persecution in the Old and the New Worlds, the British and American Jesuits, the Franciscan Sisters from Scotland and the Sisters of Mercy from England—to name just a few.

For all of you who are today called to serve the new evangelization and to build a just, compassionate and harmonious society, the Church prays with unceasing fervour. She is confident that God will help you to persevere generously in these tasks, and that he will increase your numbers, lest any of those called to life in Christ be lost because they have not heard of him, or any part of the common good be neglected.

3. *In the work of making God's word known*, the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council ascribe a special role to priests: "as co-workers with their Bishops, they have as their primary duty the proclamation of the Gospel of God to all" (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 4). To you, my Brother Priests, has been handed on this sacred duty, a share in the office given by our Saviour to the Twelve and their successors.

As I indicated in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation "*Pastores Dabo Vobis*", priests, in order to carry out their responsibilities, should have a heart formed and shaped after the pattern of the heart of the Good Shepherd (John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 1, 21-23). This is the word the Bishop of Rome has come to Jamaica to say to you: Open wide your hearts to Christ our Shepherd and High Priest! Remove every barrier! Let the fire of his love for the flock grow to a blaze within you. In imitation of him, hold back nothing for yourselves – neither possessions, nor privileges, nor comforts, not even your own will or life itself. Dedicate to your mission all that you have and all that you are.

An outstanding sign of this total consecration is your celibacy, which is "a precious gift given by God to his Church and... a sign of the Kingdom which is not of this world, a sign of God's love for this world and of the undivided love of the priest for God and for God's people" (*Ibid.* 29). Joyful fidelity to this great gift of the Spirit requires ardent and unceasing prayer; it must be sustained by daily Mass, frequent Confession and a life of asceticism. For man it would be impossible, but relying on One infinitely greater than ourselves we confidently affirm, "Nothing is impossible to God" (Lk. 1:37).

Spiritual growth in the celibate priestly life goes hand in hand with "a general and integral process of constant growth, deepening each of the aspects of formation – human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral" (John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 71). While the Bishop and the whole presbyterate have a fundamental responsibility for fostering such growth, "the individual priest... is the person

primarily responsible" (*Ibid.* 79). In the sacred intimacy of conscience God makes clear to the priest the failings for which he must do penance, the deficiencies which he needs to remedy, and the paths which he is invited to follow in order to be of even greater service to his people. Dear Fathers, for the love of the faithful entrusted to your ministry, never stifle the voice of the Spirit as he summons you "*to rekindle the gift of God that is within you*" (2Tm. 1: 6).

4. *Dear Seminarians*, always respond cheerfully and unreservedly to the demands made of you for the sake of your progress in the moral and intellectual virtues. I wish particularly to emphasize two qualities for you to cultivate in your time of formation. First, become *men of prayer*. A deeper communion of mind and heart with Christ is essential if you are truly to be reflections of the Good Shepherd, and not merely hirelings (Cf. Jn. 10: 12). Secondly, *study diligently*; know well the Church's doctrine in all its richness; become thoroughly familiar with the Scriptures and all the other sources of Catholic teaching; by achieving a profound insight into the mystery of Christ and his Church, you will be able to bring its light to bear on the lives of God's people.

Dear Deacons, you have been "consecrated by the laying on of hands that comes to us from the apostles" (*De Ordinatione Diaconi uni tantum conferenda*, "Homilia", in *De Ordinatione Diaconi, Presbyteri et Episcopi*, Editio typica, Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1968, p. 81) – "unto a ministry of service" (*Lumen Gentium*, 29). To you we can apply in a special way the words which Jesus used of himself, that he had come "not to be served but to serve" (Mt. 20: 28). In you the faithful of Jamaica should be able to see ever more clearly a witness to Christ's own servanthood. For those of you who are married, I pray that your ministry will always be a source of blessing for your families, and that the members of your household, especially your wives, will help to sustain you in your service to the local Churches for which you were ordained.

5. In addressing my greetings of particular affection to you, *the Religious of Kingston, Montego Bay and Mandeville*, I wish to begin by recalling the remarkable role which men and women consecrated to God through the evangelical counsels have played throughout the history of the Church on this Island. To speak of Friar Juan Jacinto Rodriguez de Araujo and Father James Dupeyron or Sister Paula Charlet, Mother Winifred Aloysius Furlong and Sister Mary Humiliana is not to limit the scope of our tribute, but moves us to remember all those – many of whose names are known to the Lord alone – who by their witness of the evangelical counsels have enriched the life of God's people here. It is my hope that the mention of their achievements will give you renewed confidence in the value of your religious consecration, for it is your total commitment to our Saviour through your vows which guarantees the efficacy of your service to your neighbour. Your fundamental apostolic work in the Church is always *to be who you are*. For the very reason that "your life is hid with Christ in God" (Col. 3: 3), you are a light set up in order to show others the way to the Kingdom (Cf. John Paul II *Redemptionis Donum*, 15). I urge you to work in close cooperation with the Bishops of your particular Churches, so that the gifts and charisms bestowed upon you will all the more effectively enrich the members of the wider ecclesial communities to which you belong.

6. To you, *Lay Leaders of the Jamaican Catholic community*, I express a special word of appreciation for the many ways you contribute to the growth of the Church. Your prayers for her welfare and your good deeds done for her members are the flowering of the graces poured forth into your hearts at Baptism. In my remarks to the group now awaiting me at Saint George's School, I will have the opportunity to speak about the specific vocation of the lay faithful. At this moment I wish to encourage you in your Christian lives and in all the works you do to strengthen the ecclesial community in the face of the urgent needs of Christ's flock.

In particular I would point out how important it is for the laity to be ever more involved in catechesis and religious education. As in many parts of the world, the Church in Jamaica encounters forms of superstition and sectarian fundamentalism, forces which are antagonistic to the faith and devotion of Catholics. In the face of such a challenge your witness of patient endurance and unwavering charity will win many to true faith in the Lord. Christ's faithful need solid instruction in Christian doctrine so that they will not easily fall prey to confusion and false teaching, or be lured away from the Church. I urge you to give particular attention to this area of Catholic life.

7. In just a few days the Church will celebrate the feast of Jamaica's heavenly patron, *Our Lady of the Assumption*. I am one with you and all Jamaican Catholics in asking her to obtain for you the gift of renewed strength for the work of bearing witness to her Divine Son and shaping the life of your society in accordance with his saving message.

May Mary, full of grace, guide and protect the Catholic Church in Jamaica and throughout the Caribbean.