



The Holy See

CONCLUSION OF THE SPECIAL ASSEMBLY
FOR AMERICA OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS

EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION

HOMILY OF POPE JOHN PAUL II

Friday, 12 December 1997

"In those days Mary arose ..." (Lk 1:39).

1. How evocative it is to hear again in this celebration the Gospel passage about the Visitation, to conclude the Special Assembly for America of the Synod of Bishops!

The Church is always "journeying", always on the move. She is sent and exists in order to move through time and space, announcing and witnessing to the Gospel to the ends of the earth.

About five centuries ago, the Church on pilgrimage through history journeyed to the American continent, which had just been discovered. Since then she has been established in the varied cultures of those lands; her face has taken on the features of the local people, as shown by the eloquent icon of Our Lady of Guadalupe, whose memory we celebrate in today's liturgy.

And so a continental Synod has been held this year, while the entire People of God is advancing towards the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. This is certainly a point of arrival; but even more so, a new point of departure: the Christian community, following Mary's example, is journeying again, spurred by the love of Christ, to undertake the new evangelization of the American continent. It is the beginning of a new mission, which has found its "upper room" and "pentecost" in the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, at the very beginning of a year totally dedicated to the Holy Spirit.

It is the Holy Spirit who ceaselessly guides the Christian people along the paths of salvation history. We want to thank the Lord for this today, recognizing that Christ himself is present among us and is walking with us.

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate, dear Brothers and Sisters, let us go together on spiritual pilgrimage to Bethlehem and offer the fruits of our commitment at the feet of the Son of God, who has come to save us: "Regem venturum, Dominum, venite adoremus!".

2. In these weeks we have made our own the last words of Christ the incarnate Son of God, his testament, which is also his great missionary mandate for the baptized: "Go, therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Mt 28:18-20).

In fidelity to this mandate upon which our ministry is founded, you, the Pastors of the Churches in America, do not tire of proclaiming to a world hungry for truth the living Christ, our sole salvation. He alone is our peace; he alone is that richness from which we can always receive strength and inner joy.

During the course of the Synod, we have heard echoes of the voices of the first great evangelizers of America, reminding us of our duty to be profoundly converted to Christ, the one source of authentic communion and solidarity. Now is the time of the new evangelization, a providential occasion to lead the People of God in America to cross the threshold of the third millennium with renewed hope.

How can we fail to thank God today for all those missionaries who for five centuries of history were committed to the evangelization of the continent? The Church is greatly indebted to them. Many of their names are known to us, because they have been raised to the glory of the altars. But most of those missionaries remain unknown, the majority of them religious, to whom America owes much, not only religiously but also culturally. Just as in Europe, from where the missionaries came, so too in America the intimate link between faith, evangelization and culture gave rise to countless works of art, architecture and literature, as well as many popular celebrations and traditions. A rich tradition thus arose, one which represents a significant patrimony of the peoples of South, Central and North America.

Between these regions there are differences which go back to the very origins of evangelization. The Synod, however, has highlighted very clearly how the Gospel harmonized them. Those taking part in the Synod have personally experienced this unity, the source of fraternal solidarity. In this way, the Synod has accomplished its principle task, indicated by its very name, *synodos*, that is *communion of paths*. We thank the Lord for this communion of paths, on which whole generations of Christians on that great continent have journeyed.

3. Dear brothers and sisters, during the Synod Assembly, the problems and prospects of the new evangelization in America have been examined. Any solution is based on the awareness of the urgent duty of ardently and courageously proclaiming Jesus Christ, Redeemer of the whole man and of every man. It is only in drawing from this living source that we can effectively stand up to all the challenges.

I would like to recall some of these: the authentic teaching of the Church's doctrine and a catechesis faithful to the Gospel, adapted to the needs of the time; the tasks and interaction of the different vocations and different ministries in the Church; the defence of human life from the moment of conception until its natural end; the primordial role of the family in society; the need to ensure that society, with its laws and institutions, is in harmony with the teachings of Christ; the value of human work, by which the human person cooperates in God's creative action; the evangelization of the cultural world in its various aspects. Through apostolic action rooted in the Gospel and open to the challenges of society, you can help to spread throughout America that much desired civilization of love, which underscores the primacy of man and the promotion of his dignity in all its dimensions, beginning with his spiritual dimension.

The Church in America can realize more profoundly and more extensively the consequences of authentic reconciliation with Christ, who opens hearts and enables brothers and sisters in the faith to renew their ways of working together. For the new evangelization, it is essential to have concrete collaboration between the different vocations, the different ministries and the various apostolates and charisms given by the Holy Spirit, whether those of traditional religious institutes or those of new movements and associations of the faithful established more recently.

4. Venerable and beloved Synod Fathers who formed the Special Assembly of the Synod for America, I now express to you my cordial greetings and heartfelt thanks. I have tried as much as possible to be present for the work of the Synod. This was a significant experience for me, making it easier to reinforce the bonds of affective and pastoral communion which unite me with you in Jesus Christ. This spiritual unity is now concluding in the celebration of the Eucharist, centre and summit of the Church's life and her entire apostolic project.

As you leave Rome to return to the various Dioceses of America, I impart my blessing to you and extend it to your faithful, especially to the priests, your co-workers, the religious who belong to your communities, to the lay faithful involved in the apostolate, to the young, the sick and the elderly. I assure them of my prayers and my affection. The Holy Spirit, in this year specially dedicated to him, helps us to walk together in the name of the Lord!

We have concluded the Synod's work on the day dedicated to Our Lady of Guadalupe, the first witness to Christ's presence in America. Her shrine in the heart of the American continent represents an indelible reminder of the evangelization achieved in the past five centuries. The Mother of Christ appeared to a humble man, a Native American named Juan Diego. She chose

him as the representative of all her beloved sons and daughters of those lands, in order to proclaim that divine Providence calls for the salvation of people of all races and cultures; the indigenous peoples, who lived there centuries ago, as well as people who came from Europe, in order to bring, despite their limitations and faults, the immense gift of the Good News.

During the Synod, we experienced the special presence of Our Lady, the Mother of God, venerated in the Basilica of Guadalupe. And today we want to entrust her with the future path of the Church on the great continent of America.

5. A few days ago, at the end of the the Synod's work, you accepted the proposal of the three Presidents Delegate and expressed the desire that for the promulgation of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation I return as a pilgrim to her shrine in Mexico City. In this matter I entrust the entire project and desire to her. However, I now prostrate myself spiritually at her feet, recalling my first pilgrimage in January 1979, when I knelt before that wonderful image to invoke her maternal help and protection on my recently begun pontifical service. On that occasion I placed the evangelization of America — especially Latin America — in her hands, and afterwards took part in the Third General Conference of the Latin American Episcopate in Puebla.

In your name, I renew today the call I made to her then: Mary, Virgin of Guadalupe, Mother of all America, help us to be faithful stewards of the great mysteries of God. Help us to teach the truth your Son proclaimed and to spread love, which is the first commandment and first fruit of the Holy Spirit. Help us to confirm our brothers and sisters in the faith. Help us to spread hope in eternal life. Help us to guard the great spiritual treasures of the members of God's people who are entrusted to us.

Queen of the Apostles! Accept our willingness to serve unreservedly the cause of your Son, the cause of the Gospel and of peace, based on justice and love among individuals and between peoples.

Queen of peace! Save the nations and peoples of the whole continent who trust in you; save them from war, hatred and subversion. May all, governors and the governed, learn to live in peace; may they be educated for peace, and undertake everything required by justice and respect for the rights of each person, so that peace may be strengthened.

Listen to us, "morenita" Virgin, Mother of Hope, Mother of Guadalupe!

