



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO AUSTRIA (JUNE 19-21, 1998)

EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION

HOMILY OF POPE JOHN PAUL II

Sankt Pölten
Saturday, 20 June 1998

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me" (Lk 4:18).

1. All of Jesus' life is under the influence of the Holy Spirit. In the beginning it is he who overshadows the Virgin Mary in the mystery of the Incarnation. At the Jordan, it is again the Spirit who descends on Jesus, while the Father bears witness to his beloved Son. Then it is the Spirit who leads Jesus into the wilderness. In the synagogue of Nazareth Jesus himself says: *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me"* (Lk 4:18).

Christ promises this Spirit to his Apostles as a perpetual guarantee of his presence among them. On the Cross the Son gives the Spirit back to the Father (cf. Jn 19:30). In this way he puts the seal on the New Covenant that results from the Easter event. Finally, on the day of Pentecost, Christ pours out the Holy Spirit on the first community to strengthen it in faith and to send out the *Apostles as living and courageous witnesses* on the roads of the world.

2. From that time until today the Mystical Body of Christ, his Church, has been spurred by the breath of the same Spirit on her journey through time. The Church illumines history with the burning fire of the Word of God and purifies human hearts with the water that springs from it (cf. Ez 36:25). Thus she becomes *"the people united through the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit"* (Cyprian, *De Dom. Orat.*, 23).

In this communion with the Triune God each baptized person has the possibility of living under "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:2). Led by the Spirit, the Christian enters the "spiritual space" in which the dialogue with God

takes place. The questions man asks himself are really the questions that God himself raises in his soul: Where do I come from? Who am I? Where should I go?

Dear brothers and sisters, *you are in conversation with God!* Since you belong to Christ in Baptism, God has adopted you in Christ as his sons and daughters. Be conscious of your high dignity! Do not waste this great privilege!

God has a specific plan for each one of you. His eyes rest affectionately on each of you. He always listens to everyone. Like an anxious and sensitive father, he is always near you. He gives you what you need for the new life: his Holy Spirit.

3. With your incorporation into the Church you have not only assumed the name of “Christian”, that is, “anointed”, but you have also received *the anointing of the Holy Spirit*. Thus you must not only call yourselves Christians, but you must really *be so*. *The Spirit of God is upon you, because he has anointed you* (cf. Lk 4:18).

In the new life that springs from Baptism and develops through the word and the sacraments, the *charisms*, the *ministries* and the various *forms of consecrated life* find their source. In writing to the community of Corinth, the Apostle Paul said: “There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit” (1Cor 12:4).

Today too, new calls are being given by the Holy Spirit. We must create an environment that is favourable to God's call. In this regard the parish communities have great importance. When an attitude of true loyalty to the Lord is lived in them, in an atmosphere of intense piety and a sincere willingness to bear witness, it is easier for those who are called to respond positively. The vitality of the parish community is not measured only by the number of its activities, but by the depth of its prayer life. Listening to the word of God, on the one hand, and the *celebration and adoration of the Eucharist* on the other, are the two essential pillars that support and reinforce the parish community.

There is no use in complaining about the lack of priestly and religious vocations. Vocations cannot be humanly “made”. *Vocations are obtained from God through prayer.* I invite you to ask the Lord of the harvest fervently and constantly for new vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life.

4. When Jesus on the Cross gave back his spirit to the Father, he made all his disciples “a kingdom of priests, a holy nation” (Ex 19:6). He established them in “a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God” (1 Pt 2:5). This is the *common priesthood*, for the service of which he called the Twelve “to be with him” (Mk 3:14), later to be sent out to work in his name and in his place.

Through the *ministerial priesthood* Christ continues his saving mission down to our time. For this reason, he appointed Bishops and priests, who “in the Church and on behalf of the Church ... are a *sacramental representation of Jesus Christ*, Head and Shepherd, authoritatively proclaiming his Word, repeating his acts of forgiveness and his offer of salvation” (Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores dabo vobis*, n. 15). They are sent to *preach the good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives and sight to the blind; to set at liberty those who are oppressed* (cf. Lk 4:18). Therefore, ministry in the Church is not a human achievement, but a *divine institution*.

With all respect and esteem for the valuable services of the laity in parish communities, it should never be forgotten: in

the sacramental realm a lay person cannot replace what is distinctive of the priest. Only a priest can replace another priest.

5. I would now like to greet *Bishop Kurt Krenn*, who together with his Auxiliary, Bishop Heinrich Fasching, not only prepared today's celebration of faith with such care, but is doing all he can so that in the future priests will be sent to the faithful of the numerous parishes in the Diocese of Sankt Pölten entrusted to him. I do not wish to forget the previous Bishop, Franz Žak, who laid such good foundations for his successor. I greet all my *Brothers in the Episcopate*, especially the Metropolitan, Cardinal Christoph Schönborn, and the President of the Austrian Bishops' Conference, Bishop Johann Weber.

I also have the pleasure of greeting the *Federal President, Mr Thomas Klestil*, who is taking part in this celebration. With him I greet the *representatives of political and public life* who are honouring us with their presence.

In addressing the *priests and deacons*, I would like to express to them my appreciation and gratitude. These are sentiments that I extend to all the sacred ministers working in the various Dioceses of this country. As in Sankt Pölten, there are many in the other parts of Austria too who labour with tireless zeal in the care of souls and who do not give up even in the face of illness. I am also thinking with admiration of those priests who, in addition to the parish entrusted to them, are also willing to take care of neighbouring communities so that the faithful do not lack the means of salvation. Many religious are to be praised for their involvement in pastoral care. Nor do I wish to forget the priests who come from other countries — some even from my home- land — and make a valuable contribution to pastoral ministry.

Dear priests, *young people are looking at you*. May they observe that, even though burdened with work, you are joyous servants of the Gospel and that you find fulfilment and satisfaction in your choice of life! May young people see in your witness that the priesthood *is not an outmoded way of life, but a vocation with a future!* The priesthood is a vocation with a future!

6. We should also remember with gratitude to the Holy Spirit the *numerous communities of consecrated life*, which precisely in the history of this Diocese have had such an important role in the care of souls. Brothers and sisters, I cordially greet you! You live according to the evangelical counsels and try to show by your conduct the way to the kingdom of heaven. The consecrated life belongs in the heart of the Church as an essential element for the fulfilment of her mission. It expresses the nature of the Christian vocation and the eagerness with which the entire Church as Bride yearns to be united with her only Bridegroom.

7. I cannot fail to mention *Christian married couples*. Your way of life is also a form of vocation! I praise you and encourage you in all your efforts to live the grace of the sacrament of marriage. May your families be "*domestic churches*" where children learn to live and celebrate the faith.

You *fathers and mothers* are the first school for your children. In your homes strive for harmony, a spirit of faith, hope and love, regular participation in Church life, serenity and strength amid daily problems. Ask the Lord that your children may one day know how to choose their path according to God's plan for them! Give them freedom, if they feel the Lord's call, to set out on the radical path of following Jesus Christ. Your children are not your property. They are entrusted to you by

God for a certain period of time. Your mission is to make them grow in the freedom they need to be able to make their own commitments responsibly.

8. The future of the Church and of society is decided in families. In addition to the many pastoral initiatives and aids, I would particularly like to mention the *International Institute for Studies on Marriage and the Family* which was sown as a seed in Gaming and is also supported by the Austrian Bishops. God grant that it may grow until it becomes a strong tree, able to bear much fruit to the benefit of marriage and the family.

9. Dear Brothers and Sisters! "*Let us love one another, for love is of God*" (1 Jn 4:7). Many of our contemporaries have lost God as Father. Thus, they do not know the mother tongue of faith. Let us try to teach them *the alphabet of faith*. Dedication, service and charity form part of the fundamental vocabulary that everyone understands. On this "grammar of life" can be built that will help man to spell out in the Holy Spirit the plan that God has for him.

Live in deeds what you teach with words. Show that joy is also a fruit of the Spirit. On the threshold of the third millennium, it is necessary to revive this awareness: Just as God has a plan for each individual, he also has a mission for each one. You are not only *administrators of a past legacy*; you are also *forerunners of the future* towards which the Holy Spirit is leading the Church!

May your patron *St Leopold* be your model and advocate. He was not only the father of a family, but also a father of the homeland. His tombstone, which I blessed during my last Pastoral Visit to Austria, is located today in this new government quarter. May it be an inspiration and encouragement to you all.

Let us look to the *Blessed Virgin Mary*, whose life was a journey in the Holy Spirit.

Mary, *Magna Mater Austriae*, to you we entrust the care of priestly and religious vocations.

Mary, *Mother of God*, intercede with your Son for the Church in Austria. Obtain for her numerous young people ready to commit themselves to following Christ and to offer themselves for the kingdom of God.

Mary, *Mother of the Church*, pray for us! Amen.