



The Holy See

EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION ON THE OCCASION OF THE WORLD MEETING "RECONCILIATION IN CHARITY"

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Sunday, 16 May 1999

1. *"I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living"* (Resp. Ps.). These words of the responsorial psalm echo the touching testimonies that have preceded this Eucharistic celebration, illustrating with the power of lived experience the guiding theme of this world meeting: *"reconciliation in charity"*. In every situation, even the most tragic, the Christian makes his own the invocations of the psalmist: *"The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? ... My heart says to you, 'Your face, O Lord, I seek. Hide not your face from me' "* (Ps 26:1 8-9). They instil courage, nourish hope and spur us to spend all our energy so that the Lord's face may shine like light in our lives. To seek the face of God, therefore, means to long for full communion with him; it means to love him above all and with all one's strength. The most concrete way to meet him, however, is to love human beings, in whose face shines the Creator's. A few moments ago several testimonies were given in this square, showing the marvels that God accomplishes through the generous service of the many men and women who make their lives a gift to others, a gift which continues to be given even when it is not accepted. These brothers and sisters, along with many other volunteers in every corner of the earth, show by their example that loving one's neighbour is the way to find God and to make him known even in this world of ours which is so distracted and indifferent.

2. *"I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living"*. Sustained by the Word of God, the Church constantly proclaims the goodness of the Lord. Where there is hatred, she proclaims love and forgiveness; where there is war, reconciliation and peace; where there is loneliness, acceptance and solidarity. In every corner of the earth, she prolongs Christ's prayer which re-echoes in today's Gospel: *"That they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent"* (Jn 17:3). Today, more than ever, man needs to know God in order to entrust to him, in an attitude of confident abandonment, the weakness of his wounded nature. He notices, often without realizing it, the need to experience the divine love by which he is reborn to new life. Through the various apostolates that bring it into contact with old and new forms of poverty, both spiritual and material, every ecclesial community is called to foster this encounter with "the only true God" and with the One whom he has sent, Jesus Christ. Every community is moved and prompted by the awareness that helping others does not consist merely in offering them material aid and support, but above all in leading them, by the witness of their own availability, to experience the divine goodness, which is revealed with particular force in the human mediation of fraternal charity.

3. I am very pleased today to welcome you, dear brothers and sisters, who have come in such large numbers for the *Day of Charity* organized by the Pontifical Council "Cor Unum". I am very

happy to celebrate the Eucharist with you and for you, remembering all the “witnesses of charity” who in every part of the world dedicate themselves to eliminating the injustice and poverty which unfortunately still exist in so many obvious and hidden forms. I am thinking here of the countless faces of volunteer service, of those whose work is inspired by the Gospel: religious institutes and associations of Christian charity, organizations for human development and missionary service, groups involved in the civil sphere, and organizations for social, educational and cultural work. Your activities embrace every area of human life and your actions reach countless people in trouble. I express my esteem and gratitude to each of you. I thank Archbishop Paul Josef Cordes and the staff of the Pontifical Council “Cor Unum”, who organized this meeting. It is taking place during the year of immediate preparation for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, the year dedicated to the heavenly Father, rich in goodness and mercy. I thank those who gave their testimonies and all who have wanted to take part in this highly significant gathering. I would also like to encourage each of you to continue your noble mission to which you are committed as sons and daughters of the Church wherever human beings live and suffer in situations of hardship. To everyone you meet bring the comfort of Christian solidarity; vigorously proclaim and bear witness to Christ, the Redeemer of man. He is the hope that illumines humanity's way. Be spurred and supported by the witness of the saints, particularly that of St Vincent de Paul, patron of all charitable associations.⁴ It is consoling to note the increase in the number of volunteer services which bring together people of various backgrounds, cultures and religions in humanitarian activities. I feel a spontaneous desire in my heart to thank the Lord for this growing movement of concern for the human person, of generous philanthropy and of shared solidarity. Christians are called to make their own specific contribution to this vast humanitarian effort. They know that in Sacred Scripture the call to love our neighbour is linked with the command to love God with all our heart, soul and strength (cf. *Mk* 12:29-31). How could we fail to emphasize this divine source of service to our brothers and sisters? Yes, love of neighbour conforms to Christ's mandate and example only if it is joined to the love of God. Jesus who gives his life for sinners is the living sign of God's goodness; at the same time, through their generous self-giving Christians enable the brothers and sisters they meet to experience the merciful and provident love of the heavenly Father. Certainly, the highest expression of divine charity is forgiveness, which is born of love for one's enemy. In this regard Jesus says that there is no particular merit in loving our friends and those who do good to us (cf. *Mt* 5:46-47). True merit is found in loving one's enemy. But who would have the strength to reach such a lofty height, if he were not sustained by the love of God? At this moment we see before our eyes the noble figures of heroic servants of love, who in our century offered their lives for their brethren by dying in fulfilment of Christ's greatest commandment. As we welcome their teaching, we are invited to follow in their footsteps, knowing that Christians express their love of Jesus in self-giving to others, because whatever they do to the least of their brethren, they do to the Lord himself (cf. *Mt* 25:31-46).⁵ *“All these with one accord devoted themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary, the Mother of Jesus ...”* (*Acts* 1:14). The icon of volunteer service is certainly that of the Good Samaritan, who promptly tended the wounds of the unknown traveler who had fallen among thieves as he went down from Jerusalem to Jericho (cf. *Lk* 10:30-37). Next to this image, on which we must continually reflect, the liturgy today offers us another: in the Upper Room the Apostles and Mary pray together as they wait to receive the Holy Spirit. Action presupposes contemplation: it springs from the latter and is nourished by it. Love cannot be given to one's brothers and sisters unless it has first been drawn from the genuine source of divine charity, and this happens only in prolonged moments of prayer, of listening to the Word of God, of adoring the Eucharist, the source and summit of the Christian life. Prayer and active involvement form a vital, inseparable and fruitful combination. Dear brothers and sisters, may these two “icons of love” inspire all your actions and your whole life. May Mary, the Virgin who listens, obtain from the Holy Spirit the gift of charity for each of you. May she make you all artisans of the *culture of solidarity* and builders of the *civilization of love*. Amen! ©

