



The Holy See

SOLEMNITY OF THE BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Thursday, 3 June 1999

1. *Lauda, Sion, Salvatorem!* Zion, praise your Saviour!

Praise your Saviour, Christian community of Rome gathered in front of this cathedral basilica dedicated to Christ the Saviour and to his Precursor, John the Baptist! Praise him, because "he makes peace in your borders; he fills you with the finest of the wheat" (*Responsorial Psalm*, 147:14).

The Solemnity of *Corpus Christi* is a feast of praise and thanksgiving. On this day the Christian people gather round the altar to contemplate and adore the Eucharistic Mystery, the memorial of the sacrifice of Christ who has brought everyone salvation and peace. This year our solemn celebration and, in a while, the traditional procession which will take us from this square to St Mary Major have a specific aim: they are meant as a heartfelt and unanimous prayer for peace.

As we adore the Body of the One who is our Head, how can we not show our solidarity with his members who are suffering because of war? Yes, dear brothers and sisters, Romans and pilgrims, this evening we want to pray together for peace, especially for peace in the Balkans. May the Word of God, which we have just heard, enlighten and guide us.

2. In the first reading the Lord's command resounded: "*Remember all the way which the Lord your God has led you*" (*Dt 8:2*). "*Remember ...!*" This is the first word. It is not an invitation, but a command that the Lord gives his people before leading them into the promised land. He commands them not to forget.

To have peace, which sums up all the good things promised by God, it is first necessary not to

forget past experiences but to treasure them. From errors, too, we can learn a lesson to give better direction to our journey.

In looking at this century and the end of this millennium, how could we forget the terrible sufferings endured by humanity? We must not forget: on the contrary, we must remember. God our Father, help us to learn the right lessons from our history and that of those who have gone before us!

3. History speaks of great yearning for peace, but also of the recurring disappointments humanity has had to suffer amid tears and blood. John XXIII, the Pope of *Pacem in terris*, died precisely today, 3 June, 36 years ago. What a unanimous chorus of praise welcomed that document which outlined the principles for building true peace in the world! But in recent years, how many times have we had to witness the outbreak of violent warfare in one part of the world or another.

The believer, however, does not give up. He knows he can always count on God's help. In this regard, Jesus' words at the Last Supper sound particularly eloquent: "*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you*" (Jn 14:27). Today we want once again to welcome and understand these words in depth. Let us enter into the spirit of the Upper Room to contemplate Christ, who under the appearances of bread and wine gives his Body and his Blood, anticipating Calvary in this sacrament. This is how he gave us peace. St Paul would later remark: "He is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility ... through the cross" (Eph 2:14, 16).

In giving himself, Christ gave us peace. His peace is not that of the world, often made of shrewdness and compromises, and of oppression and violence. Christ's peace is the fruit of his Passover, that is, the fruit of his sacrifice which uproots hatred and violence and reconciles human beings with God and with one another; it is the trophy of his victory over sin and death, of his peaceful war against the evil of the world, a war fought and won with the weapons of truth and love.

4. It is not by chance that this greeting is frequently heard on the lips of the risen Christ. Appearing to the Apostles, he first shows the signs in his hands and side of the hard struggle he endured, and then he greets them: "*Peace be with you!*" (Jn 20:19, 21, 26). He communicates his peace to the disciples as a precious gift, not to keep jealously hidden, but to share with others through their witness.

This evening, dear friends, as we carry the Eucharist, the sacrament of Christ our Passover in procession through the streets of Rome, we will be bringing the message of that peace which he left us and which the world cannot give. As we walk, we will ask ourselves about our personal witness to peace. It is not enough, in fact, to speak of peace if we do not strive to foster sentiments of peace in our hearts and to express them in our daily relations with those who live around us.

We will carry the Eucharist in procession and raise our heartfelt prayers to the "Prince of Peace" for the neighbouring land of the Balkans, where already too much innocent blood has been shed and where too many violations have been committed against the dignity and rights of individuals and peoples.

Our prayer this evening is strengthened by the hopeful prospects which are finally emerging.

5. "*The bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh*" (Jn 6:51). In the Gospel passage we have just heard, these words of Jesus have helped us understand what the source of true peace is. Christ is our peace, the "bread" offered for the life of the world. He is the "bread" which God the Father prepared, so that humanity might have life and have it abundantly (cf. Jn 10:10).

God did not spare his Son, but gave him as the salvation of all, as the Bread we must eat if we wish to have life. Christ's words are clear: to have life it is not enough to believe in God; it is necessary to dwell in him (cf. Jas 2:14). This is why the Word was made flesh, died and rose and gave us his Spirit; this is why he left us the Eucharist, so that we could live on him as he lives on the Father. The Eucharist is the sacrament of the gift Christ made of himself for us: he is the sacrament of love and peace, which is the fullness of life.

6. "*Living bread, who gives life!*".

Lord Jesus, before you, our Passover and our peace, we commit ourselves to non-violently opposing man's violence against man.

Prostrate at your feet, O Christ, today we want to share *the bread of hope* with our brothers and sisters in despair; *the bread of peace* with our brothers and sisters tortured by ethnic cleansing and war; *the bread of life* with our brothers and sisters threatened each day by weapons of destruction and death.

O Christ, we want to share the *living Bread of your peace* with the innocent and most defenceless victims.

"We offer you this sacrifice of praise for ourselves and those who are dear to us" (*Roman Canon*), so that you, O Christ, born of the Virgin Mary, Queen of Peace, may be for us, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, the source of life, love and peace.

Amen!

