



The Holy See

PILGRIMAGE TO KAZAKHSTAN

HOMILY OF THE HOLY FATHER

Astana – Square of the Motherland

Sunday, 23 September 2001

1. *"There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all" (1 Tim 2:5).*

These words from the Apostle Paul's First Letter to Timothy contain *the central truth of Christian faith*; and it is my joy to announce this truth to you today, dear Brothers and Sisters of Kazakhstan. I come among you as an apostle of Christ and a witness to him; I come as a friend to all people of good will. To each and every one I come to offer the peace and love of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

I know your history. I know the sufferings to which many of you have been subjected, when the previous totalitarian regime took you from your lands of origin and deported you here in a situation of distress and deprivation. I am happy to be here today among you and to tell you that you are close to the Pope's heart.

With affection I embrace each of you, dear Brothers in the Episcopate and the Priesthood. I extend special greetings to Bishop Tomasz Peta, Apostolic Administrator of Astana, and I thank him for the words he has spoken on your behalf. I greet the representatives of the other Churches and Ecclesial Communities, as well as the representatives of other Religions found in this vast Eurasian region. I greet His Excellency the President of the Republic, and the civil and military authorities and all who are united with us in this celebration.

2. *"There is one God"*. The Apostle proclaims before all else *the absolute oneness of God*. This is a truth which Christians inherited from the children of Israel and which they share with Muslims: it is faith in the one God, "Lord of heaven and earth" (Lk 10:21), almighty and merciful.

In the name of this one God, I turn to the people of deep and ancient religious traditions, the people of Kazakhstan. I turn as well to those who belong to no religion and to those who are searching for truth. To them let me repeat the well-known words of Saint Paul, which it was my joy to hear repeated last May at the Areopagus in Athens: "[God] is not far from each one of us, for in him we live and move and have our being" (*Acts 17:27-28*). And I recall what was written by your great poet Abai Kunanbai: "Can his existence really be doubted / if every thing on the earth bears witness to him?" (*Poetry*, 14).

3. "*There is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus*". After proclaiming the mystery of God, the Apostle contemplates *Christ, the one mediator of salvation*. His is a mediation, Saint Paul notes in another of his Letters, which works *through poverty*: "Though he was rich, he became poor for your sake, so that by his poverty you might become rich" (*2 Cor 8:9*).

Jesus "did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped" (*Phil 2:6*); he did not want to appear before our humanity, which is poor and fragile, in his overwhelming superiority. Had he done so, he would have obeyed the logic not of God but of the potentates of this world, denounced unequivocally by the prophets of Israel, like Amos, from whom today's First Reading is taken.

The life of Jesus was in full harmony with the saving plan of the Father, "who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (*1 Tim 2:4*). He bore faithful witness to the divine will, giving "himself as a ransom for all" (*1 Tim 2:6*). Giving himself completely in love, Jesus won for us friendship with God, which had been lost because of sin. This "logic of love" is what he holds out to us, asking us to live it above all through generosity to those in need. It is a logic which can bring together Christians and Muslims, and commit them to work together for the "civilization of love". It is a logic which overcomes all the cunning of this world and allows us to make true friends who will welcome us "into the eternal dwelling-places" (*Lk 16:9*), into the "homeland" of heaven.

4. Dearly beloved, *humanity's homeland is the Kingdom of heaven!* How compelling it is for us to ponder this truth in this place, in the *Square which bears the name of the Mother Land*, and where stands the monument symbolizing it. The Second Vatican Council taught that there is a link between human history and the Kingdom of God, between the various stages of society's progress and the final goal towards which humanity is called by the free decision of God (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 33-39).

The *tenth anniversary of the independence* of Kazakhstan, which you celebrate this year, prompts us to view things in this perspective. What link is there between this *earthly homeland*, with its values and goals, and the *heavenly homeland*, into which the whole human family is called to enter beyond every injustice and conflict? The Council's answer is enlightening: "Earthly progress must be distinguished from the unfolding of the Kingdom of Christ, but to the extent that it contributes to a better ordering of human society, it is most important for the Kingdom of God" (*ibid.*, 39).

5. Christians are both *inhabitants of this world and citizens of the Kingdom of heaven*. They commit themselves wholeheartedly to the building of earthly society, but they remain focused upon the good things of eternity, as if looking to a superior and surpassing model in order to implement it ever more effectively in everyday life.

Christianity does not lead to alienation from the tasks of this earth. If at times, in some quite particular situations, it gives this impression, that is because many Christians do not live as they should. But in truth, when it is lived as it should be, Christianity is a leaven in society, producing growth and maturity on the human level and opening society to the transcendent dimension of the Kingdom of Christ, in which the new humanity will be fully accomplished.

This spiritual dynamism *draws strength from prayer*, as today's Second Reading made clear. And in this celebration we want *to pray for Kazakhstan* and its inhabitants, so that this vast nation, with all its ethnic, cultural and religious variety, will grow stronger in justice, solidarity and peace. May it progress on the basis in particular of cooperation between Christians and Muslims, committed day by day, side by side, in the effort to fulfil God's will.

6. Yet prayer must always be *accompanied by appropriate works*. Following Christ's example, the Church never separates evangelization from human promotion, and she urges the faithful in every circumstance *to work for social renewal and progress*.

Dear Brothers and Sisters, may the "Mother Land" of Kazakhstan find in you her loving and concerned children, faithful to the spiritual and cultural heritage received from your forebears and able to adapt this heritage to new demands.

In keeping with the Gospel, distinguish yourself by your *humility and integrity*, offering your talents for the sake of the common good and showing special concern for the weakest and most disadvantaged. Respect for each one's rights, even when that person has different personal beliefs, is the foundation of all truly human harmony.

In deep and practical ways, *have an attitude of communion among yourselves and towards everyone*, drawing inspiration from what the Acts of the Apostles tell us of the first community of believers (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32). At the Eucharistic table, your charity is nourished: *bear witness to it in fraternal love* and in service to the poor, the sick and the abandoned. Bring people together and work for reconciliation and peace between individuals and groups, nurturing genuine dialogue so that the truth will always emerge.

7. *Love the family!* Defend and promote it as the basic cell of human society; nurture it as the prime sanctuary of life. Give great care to *the preparation of engaged couples and be close to young married couples*, so that they will be for their children and the whole community an eloquent testimony of God's love.

Dear Brothers and Sisters, deeply moved with joy, I want to exhort you and all the believers united with us in the words which I have often repeated as we begin this millennium: *Duc in altum!*

With affection I embrace you, people of Kazakhstan, and I encourage you to bring to completion all your projects of love and salvation. God will never abandon you. Amen.