



The Holy See

Visit to the St John the Baptist Cathedral

Maribor, 19 September 1999

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and the Priesthood!

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ!

1. It is a great joy for me to meet you in this cathedral where lie the mortal remains of the revered Bishop Anton Martin Slomsek, whom I had the joy of proclaiming blessed this morning. I thank Bishop Franc Kramberger of Maribor for his remarks, which expressed the sentiments of this distinguished assembly and explained its purpose. I greet all the Bishops here, as well as the priests, men and women religious and lay faithful.

I also greet the group of university rectors from Central Europe, who have come here to celebrate the 140th anniversary of the foundation, through Bl. Slomsek's efforts, of what would become the Theology Faculty of Maribor.

I extend a respectful greeting to the President of the Parliament and the Deputy Head of Government and the other State authorities, along with all who helped to prepare my visit.

2. Two years ago last May, the Slovenian Episcopal Conference decided to hold a Plenary Synod to reflect on the road traveled thus far by the Church in Slovenia and to prepare for the future in view of the beginning of the third millennium. You, dear Bishops, chose for the Synod's motto an exhortation taken from the Book of Deuteronomy: "Choose life" (30: 19). It is a particularly significant theme for contemporary man, who thirsts for life and yet is so unsure of its meaning and value. In truth, the culture of every age must be measured against this theme.

With this Synod the Church in Slovenia is preparing to celebrate the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 by making a renewed commitment to a more faithful application of the Second Vatican Council. One of the distinctive features of the Council's teaching is without doubt its doctrine on the People of God. It can be summed up in the word "*communio*", communion. This fundamental concept takes us back to the very sources of the Church, to Trinitarian communion, and, in the light of this ineffable mystery, it helps us to understand the Church's reality as the profound unity of

all the baptized. Beyond their specific vocations, they share in the threefold ministry of Christ as Priest, Prophet and King. The Church's life and the relationships between her members must fully express this equality of dignity albeit in a diversity of ministries.

The Synod is certainly a remarkable expression of this communion, for it represents the whole community: pastors, religious and laity. The laity are asked in particular to make a specific contribution on those topics which more directly involve their experience in the world and their mission (cf. *Lumen gentium*, n. 30). The Pastors, for their part, will be aware of their responsibility as leaders concerned for the good of the faithful and will do all they can to harmonize the various charisms and ministries, while never forgetting that the first and indispensable agent of ecclesial life and its renewal is the Spirit of God. The Synod's success depends on everyone's ability, that of pastors and faithful, to listen to him, to understand what he is asking at the present moment: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the Churches" (*Rv* 2: 7).

3. Dear brothers and sisters who comprise this Synod Assembly and have gathered today at the tomb of Bl. Bishop Slomsek! The role you play in the celebration of this Synod is both a great honour and a great responsibility. In the course of its preparation thus far, you have already shown to a considerable extent your ability to listen to one another and to work together. You must continue in this way. The Synod is an historic occasion for the Church in Slovenia: she is called to design an updated and effective pastoral plan for the new social situation. She is supported in this task by the witness of faith and dedication to the Gospel cause offered in the past by Bishops, priests, religious and lay faithful. The pastors did all they could for their people, which has earned them respect and reverence. It is a legacy of communion which should also be used to advantage in the changed historical conditions.

Dear brothers and sisters, look to Bl. Slomsek! His thoughts were always directed to the human person in his concrete situation, and he knew how to regard his problems, anxieties and personal poverty as well as his joys, his resources and his ideals. Now it is your turn to imitate him. Do so by walking together, drawing the strength for this profound communion from attentive listening to the Word and devout participation in the Eucharist, which is the source of the Church's life: indeed, its very heart. Be docile to the Holy Spirit, so that you may be "clothed with power from on high" (cf. Lk 24: 49) and can enthusiastically dedicate yourselves, like the first disciples, to the work of the new evangelization.

To evangelize, to proclaim to all the joyful news of salvation in Christ: let this be your first and foremost concern. To do so, do not be afraid to demand the conditions of freedom which are indispensable for the fulfilment of the Church's mission. If Christians, as citizens, have a duty to contribute to the good of all society, as faithful they have the right not to be hampered in their legitimate activities. In this regard, given the fundamental role of Christianity and the Catholic Church in Slovenia's history and culture, it is only right to hope that the process towards effective Church-State collaboration can quickly move ahead by encouraging a resolution of the current difficulties, all to the advantage of that cooperation which is in the interests of society as a whole.

4. I would now like to turn my thoughts to the entire Church of Slovenia, which you worthily represent. I wish to speak to the heart of every believer in every corner of your beloved land. I would like to say to all: you, the Church which lives in Slovenia, "choose life"; choose this precious gift of God, Creator and Saviour, over everything else! Bring this gift to those who do not have the strength to forgive, to the men and women who have known the bitterness of a failed marriage; bring it to young people, who are often the victims of false idols; bring it to Slovenian families, so that they can fulfil their demanding mission with trust and generosity; bring it to all who are working together for the kingdom of God, so that they will not be discouraged by the problems they face; bring it to those who are making a contribution by their work, particularly by accepting public office, to the common good of all the citizens.

Church in Slovenia, you are a pilgrim of hope: continue the journey you began 1,250 years ago and cross the threshold of the third millennium with courage and confidence. Follow in the footsteps of Christ; follow the figure of St Andrew the Apostle, patron of this Diocese of Maribor, and of Bl. Bishop Anton Martin Slomsek, the figure of an enlightened and tireless pastor. May Blessed Mary, Mother and Queen of Slovenia, whom all your people venerate with the title *Marija Pomagaj*, watch over you and over all your endeavours.

I promise you, beloved Church living in Slovenia, and every one of your members, as well as the whole Slovenian people, a remembrance in prayer, as I cordially bless one and all.