



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO CROATIA (OCTOBER 2-4, 1998)

**HOMILY OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II
AT ZNJAN ESPLANADE IN SPLIT**

4 October 1998

1. "We are unworthy servants" (Lk 17:10). These words of Christ surely kept echoing in the hearts of the Apostles when, obedient to his command, they set out on the highways of the world in order to proclaim the Gospel. They travelled from one city to another, from one region to the next, spending themselves in the service of the Kingdom and always taking to heart the admonition of Jesus: "When you have done all that is commanded you, say: 'We are unworthy servants; we have done only what was our duty'" (Lk 17:10). The Apostles handed on this same realization to their disciples, including those who first crossed the Adriatic Sea and brought the Gospel to Roman Dalmatia, to the people who then dwelt along this beautiful coast and in the other, no less beautiful, lands reaching as far as Pannonia. The faith thus began to spread among your ancestors, who in turn handed it down to you. This has been a long historical process, which goes back to the time of Saint Paul and which had a forceful new beginning in the seventh century, with the arrival of the Croatian people. Today we want to thank the Most Holy Trinity for the Baptism received by your ancestors. Christianity arrived here from the East and from Italy, from Rome, and it shaped your national tradition. Remembering this evokes a lively and deep sense of gratitude to Divine Providence for this two-fold gift: first and foremost, the gift of your call to faith, and then the gift of the fruits which that faith has borne in your culture and your way of life. Along the Croatian coast, down the centuries, there arose wonderful architectural masterpieces, which inspired awe in countless people in every age. Everyone could enjoy this splendid heritage, standing out amid the lovely countryside. Tragically, as a result of war, many of these treasures have been destroyed or damaged. The eye of man can no longer rejoice in them. How can we not feel regret for this? 2. "We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty". Jesus' words raise questions which cannot be avoided: have we really done what was our duty? And what must we do now? What tasks lie before us? What resources and what forces do we have at hand? The questions are complex and so the answer to them must be carefully thought through. Today we ask these questions as Christians, as followers of Christ, and with this awareness we read the page of Saint Paul's Letter to Timothy. There the Apostle, listing some of the disciples, also mentions the name of Titus,

recalling his mission in Dalmatia. Titus was thus one of the first evangelizers of these lands, singular evidence of the Apostle's concern that the Gospel should be brought here. In the words of the aged Paul, we hear an echo of the apostolic concern which marked his whole life. Now, at the moment when he must depart from this life (cf. 2 *Tim* 4:6), he writes to his disciple: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (2 *Tim* 4:7). This is both a testimony and a testament. In this context, Paul's final words take on greater significance: "The Lord stood by me and gave me strength to proclaim the message fully, that all the Gentiles might hear it" (2 *Tim* 4:17). Those who today, at the end of the Second Millennium, must continue the work of evangelization can draw light and strength from these words. In this work, at once divine and human, we need to call upon the power of the Lord. On the threshold of the new Millennium, we rightly speak of the need for a new evangelization: new in method, but always the same with regard to the truths it proclaims. The new evangelization is an immense task: universal in its content and destination, it must take on new and diverse forms, adapting to the needs of different places. How can we not sense the need of God's help to sustain our weakness and limitations? Let us pray that the Church in your Catholic nation will be able to see clearly, with God's help, the challenges and tasks associated with the new evangelization and rightly direct all her efforts, "*tertio millennio adveniente*".

3. I thank the Metropolitan Archbishop, Ante Juric, for the words of welcome which he addressed to me at the start of this Eucharistic celebration, in your name and in the name of all the people of good will in this beloved land of Croatia. I greet the Bishops of the ecclesiastical Province of Split-Makarska and all the other Bishops of Croatia, particularly Cardinal Franjo Kuharic. I also welcome with gratitude the Pastors of the Church in nearby Bosnia-Herzegovina: the Archbishop of Sarajevo, Cardinal Vinko Puljic, with his Auxiliary, Bishop Pero Sudar; the Bishop of Mostar-Duvno and Apostolic Administrator of Trebinje-Mrkan, Bishop Ratko Peric, and the Bishop of Banja Luka, Franjo Komarica. I likewise greet all the other Bishops present. Finally, I greet the President of the Republic, the Head of Government and the civil and military authorities, who have wished to be present here with us.

4. Dear friends, Split and Solin make up the second and final stage of my Pastoral Visit to Croatia. These two places have a very special significance in the growth of Christianity in this region - from Roman times and, later, Croatian times - and they evoke a long and wonderful history of faith from the time of the Apostles until our own days. "If you had faith as a grain of mustard seed..." (*Lk* 17:6), Jesus said just now in the Gospel reading. God's grace has made that grain of faith sprout and grow to become a great tree, rich in fruits of holiness. Even at the harshest moments of your history, there have always been men and women who have kept repeating: "The Catholic faith is my vocation" (the Servant of God Ivan Merz, in *Positio super vita, virtutibus et fama sanctitatis*, Rome, 1998, p. 477); men and women who have made the faith their programme of life. So it was for the martyr Domnius in Roman times, so it was also for the many martyrs during the Turkish occupation, up to the Blessed martyr Alojzije Stepinac in our own time. The decision of your forefathers to accept the Catholic faith, the faith proclaimed and professed by the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, has played a central role in the religious and civil history of your Nation. "This was an event of capital importance for the Croats, because from that moment on they accepted with alacrity the Gospel of Christ as it was disseminated and taught in Rome. The Catholic faith has permeated the national life of the Croats": so wrote your Bishops (*Pastoral Letter*, 16 March 1939) in preparation for the Jubilee of the evangelization of the Croats, planned for 1941 and then postponed because of events which overwhelmed your country, Europe and the entire world.

5. This is a heritage which makes demands of you. In the Letter I wrote for the Year of *Branimir*, one of the stages of the celebration of the Jubilee of the Baptism of your People, I told you: "By your perseverance you have entered into a sort of pact with Christ and his Church: you must remain faithful to this pact, all the more so when the times are in contrast with it. Remain always as you were in that glorious year of 879" (15 May 1979). Today I repeat these words to you, in the new social and political climate which has emerged in your country. The Lord has not failed to enlighten your days with hope (cf. *Eph* 1:17-18), and now, with the coming of freedom

and democracy, it is legitimate to expect a new springtime of faith in this land of Croatia. The Church is now able to employ many means of evangelization and can approach all sectors of society. This is a promising moment which Providence is offering to this generation in order to proclaim the Gospel and bear witness to Christ Jesus, the one Saviour of the world, and thus to contribute to the building of a society worthy of man. Concretely, the Christians of Croatia are today called to give a new face to their country, above all by committing themselves to the renewal in society of the ethical and moral values undermined by past totalitarianism and by the recent violence of war. This is a task which calls for the expenditure of much energy and a firm and persevering will. It is an urgent task, for without values there can be no true freedom or true democracy. Fundamental among these values is respect for human life, for the rights and dignity of the person, as well as for the rights and dignity of peoples. The Christian knows that he has a very specific responsibility, together with his fellow-citizens, for the destiny of his own country and for the promotion of the common good. Faith is always a commitment to the service of others, of one's fellow-citizens, considered as brothers and sisters. And there can be no effective witness without a deeply-lived faith, without a life anchored in the Gospel and imbued with love for God and for neighbour, following the example of Jesus Christ. For the Christian, to bear witness means to reveal to others the marvels of God's love, working in union with one's brothers and sisters to build that Kingdom of which the Church is "on earth, the seed and first growth" (*Lumen Gentium*, 5).6. "If you had faith..." "We are unworthy servants...". Faith does not seek the extraordinary, but strives to be useful by serving our brothers and sisters in the light of the Kingdom. Its grandeur lies in humility: "We are unworthy servants...". A humble faith is an authentic faith. And an authentic faith, even if it is as small "as a grain of mustard seed", can make extraordinary things happen. How many times has this happened in this land! May the future prove once more the truth of these words of the Lord, so that the Gospel may continue to bear abundant fruits of holiness among generations yet to come. May the Lord of history accept the petitions which rise up today from this land of Croatia. May he hear the prayer of all those who profess the holy Name of God and ask to persevere in fidelity to the great baptismal Covenant of their forefathers. Sustained by faith in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, may this people build its future on its ancient Christian roots, dating to the time of the Apostles! Praised be Jesus and Mary! © Copyright 1998 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana