



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO CROATIA (OCTOBER 2-4, 1998)
SPEECH TO CATECHISTS AND ECCLESIAL MOVEMENTS

Solin, Shrine of Our Lady of the Isle

4 October 1998

Dear Brothers and Sisters!

1. "The Holy Spirit will come upon you and you will be my witnesses" (*Acts 1:8*). These words which Christ spoke before returning to the Father have been chosen as the motto of my Pastoral Visit which is now nearing its end. They are words which have resounded here since apostolic times; and still today they retain all their force thanks to the working of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the men and women of Croatia.

I have come here to Solin after raising the martyr Alojzije Stepinac to the honours of the Altar, at the shrine of Marija Bistrica yesterday. By means of this apostolic journey I have wished to mark the link between your people's places of faith and devotion, recalling the witness which you as a people have borne to Christ from the first centuries down to our own days.

We are gathered here beneath the gaze of the Our Lady of the Isle, beneath the gaze of the Madonna of the great Croatian Baptismal Vow, at the first Marian Shrine on Croatian soil. We are gathered in the place which preserves important memories of the faith reaching back into the distant history of your people. This place has a unique position in the history of Croatian Catholics and the Croatian nation. Here is the wellspring of your identity; here are your deep Christian roots. This is the place which bears witness to the faithfulness of the Catholics of this region to Christ and to the Church.

2. I thank most sincerely the Metropolitan Archbishop Ante Juric for his kind words of welcome. I greet Cardinal Franjo Kuharic and Cardinal Vinko Puljic, together with my other Brothers in the Episcopate, the clergy, the men and women Religious, the teachers, the representatives of Ecclesial Associations and Movements, and above all the young people whom I see here in great numbers.

Dear friends, I wish to offer you a word of hope, and invite you to remain open, in the Church, to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, in order to bear effective witness to Christ, each of you in the context of your own life and work. "You have been anointed by the Holy One and you all have knowledge....you know the truth" (1 Jn 2:20-21).

Blessed Alojzije Stepinac offered an extraordinary example of Christian witness. He fulfilled the mission of spreading the Gospel by suffering for the Church, and he sealed his message of faith with his death. He preferred prison to freedom, in order to defend the freedom and the unity of the Church. He had no fear of chains, lest the word of the Gospel be chained.

3. Dear members of Ecclesial Associations and Movements, the lay faithful have a distinctive place in the Church. Because of the Baptism they have received, they are called to share in the Church's one, universal mission (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 33, 38; *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 3), each according to the gifts received. It is necessary therefore to foster a healthy pluralism of types of association, shunning all exclusivism, in order to give room to the charisms which the Holy Spirit distributes unceasingly in the Church for the building of the Kingdom of God and for the good of humanity.

The Church in Croatia places great hopes in you. "Do not quench the Spirit" (cf 1 Thess 5:19). The charism that you have received has been given to you for the good of all, so that all may develop as in a healthy and living body (cf. 1 Cor 12:12-17; Rm 12:4-5). "We have different gifts according to the grace given to each of us" (Rm 12:6).

The special task of the lay Ecclesial Movements and Associations is to promote and sustain the communion of the Church under the guidance of the Bishop, who is "the visible principle and foundation of the unity of each particular Church" (*Lumen Gentium*, 22). There is no ecclesial communion unless there is communion with the Bishop: "*Episcopo attendite, ut et Deus vobis attendat*" (Saint Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to Polycarp*, 6, 1: Funk 1, 250).

4. Dear teachers, to you is entrusted the splendid mission of educating the young, by becoming examples and guides for them. You know that every educational programme must be rich in spiritual, human and cultural values, if it is to attain its proper goal. As I said recently, "a school cannot limit itself to offering young people insights in the different branches of knowledge; it must also help them to seek the meaning of life in the right direction" (*Angelus*, 13 September 1998).

To invest in the formation of the younger generation is to invest in the future of the Church and the nation. Without a sound formation of the younger generation there can be no reassuring prospects for the future of either the local Church or the Nation. The shape and direction of the future depend in large part upon you educators. The Second Vatican Council declares: “The future of humanity is placed in the hands of those who can transmit to the generations of tomorrow reasons to live and to hope” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 31).

Young people need the witness of a love that is capable of self-sacrifice and of patience that perseveres with trust. May love and patience be your strongest arguments. May you always find your inspiration in the divine pedagogy of Christ Jesus, who teaches us through his Gospel.

In urging you to give the best of yourselves to the fulfilment of your duty, I cannot fail to express the hope that society will make good use of your professional commitment and recognize it for what it is. On behalf of the Church, I wish to express to you deep appreciation for your valued service in a field as delicate and decisive as the formation of those setting out on life’s journey.

5. A special word is due to you, dear catechists and teachers of religion. In schools and parishes, you are called upon to help the younger generation to know Christ, to be able to follow him and bear witness to him. You are called to help the young to take their place in the Church and society, and to overcome, in the light of the Gospel, the difficulties which they meet on their way to human and spiritual maturity.

In proposing to the young reasons for living and hoping, the catechist is called to offer them a deeper and clearer knowledge of God and of the history of salvation, which culminated in the Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. The central focus of all that the catechist and teacher of religion does is found in the proclamation of the Word of God, in the effort to stir up faith and bring it to maturity. Catechesis and religious instruction must be that opportunity for witness which will establish between teacher and student a true and deep contact, capable of fostering faith.

6. It remains for me to say one more word, the last but perhaps the most important of all. It is directed to you, dear young people. It is a brief word, but it is essential. It is this: Jesus Christ is “the Way, and the Truth, and the Life” (cf. *Jn* 14:6). He never lets anyone down; and he is the best friend of the young. Allow yourselves to be conquered by him (cf. *Phil* 3:12), so that you may lead a truly meaningful life, as actors in a marvellous and splendid adventure, filled with love of God and neighbour (cf. *Mt* 22:37- 40). The future is in your hands: your own future, but also the future of the Church and the Nation. In the years ahead, you will have to face great responsibilities. You will be able to tackle your future tasks if you prepare yourselves properly now, with the help of your families, the Church and your educational centres.

Learn to find your proper place in the Church and in society, by generously accepting the responsibilities entrusted to you now in the family and outside of it. This is the best way to prepare

yourselves for the tasks of tomorrow. Never forget that anything in your lives which is not in tune with God's plan for the human person is doomed sooner or later to failure. It is only with God and in God that people can find complete fulfilment and attain the fullness to which they tend from the depths of their hearts.

One of your poets has written: "*Felix, qui semper vitae bene computat usum*" (M. Marulic, *Carmen de Doctrina Domini Nostri Iesu Christi Pendentis in Cruce*, v. 77). It is vital to choose true values, not those which pass, to choose genuine truth, not half-truths and pseudo-truths. Do not trust those who promise you easy solutions. Nothing great can be built without sacrifice.

7. It is time to say farewell. A final greeting to you all, especially to you, the people of Solin: be proud of the treasures of faith which history has entrusted to you. Guard them jealously.

I would like to take my leave of you by quoting the words of Blessed Alojzije Stepinac: "You would be unworthy of the names of your forefathers if you agreed to be separated from the rock upon which Christ has built the Church" (*Testament*, 1957).

I commend you all to the one who according to the flesh was Mother of the Word made man for our salvation. From this first of her shrines on Croatian soil, may Our Lady of the Isle watch over you, your families and your Nation, and may she sustain you in your witness to Christ in the new millennium which is now so near!

My blessing to you all!

Praised be Jesus and Mary!

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