



# The Holy See

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APOSTOLIC JOURNEY  
TO THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC,  
MEXICO AND THE BAHAMAS

EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION

**HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II**

*Santo Domingo, Independence Square*

*Thursday, 25 January 1979*

*Brothers in the Episcopate, Beloved Sons:*

1. In this Eucharist in which we share the same faith in Christ, the Bishop of Rome and of the universal Church, present among you, gives you his greeting of peace: "Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ." (Gal 1:3.)

I come to these American lands as a pilgrim of peace and hope, to take part in an ecclesial event of evangelization, urged in my turn by the words of the Apostle Paul: "If I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!" (1 Cor 9:16.)

The present period of the history of humanity calls for a renewed transmission of faith, to communicate to modern man the perennial message of Christ, adapted to his concrete conditions of life.

This evangelization is a constant and an essential exigency of ecclesial dynamics. In his encyclical *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Paul VI affirmed: "Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize..." (n. 14.)

And the same Pontiff states that "as an evangelizer, Christ first of all proclaims a kingdom, the kingdom of God". "As the kernel and centre of his Good News, Christ proclaims salvation, this great gift which is, above all, liberation from everything that oppresses man but which is, above all, liberation from sin and the Evil One." (n. 89.)

2. The Church, faithful to her mission, continues to present to the men of every age, with the help of the Holy Spirit and under the Pope's guidance, the message of salvation of her divine Founder.

This Dominican land was once the first to receive, and then to give impetus to a grand enterprise of evangelization which deserves great admiration and gratitude.

From the end of the fifteenth century, this beloved nation opens us to the faith of Jesus Christ; to this it has remained faithful up to the present. The Holy See, on its side, creates the first episcopal sees of America precisely in this island, and subsequently the archiepiscopal and primatial see of Santo Domingo.

In a comparatively short period, the paths of faith crossed the Dominican land and the continent in all directions, laying the foundations of the heritage, become life, that we contemplate today in what was called the New World.

From the first moments of the discovery, there appears the concern of the Church to make the kingdom of God present in the heart of the new peoples, races, and cultures; in the first place, among your ancestors.

If we wish to express our well-deserved thanks to those who transplanted the seeds of faith, this tribute must be paid in the first place to the religious orders which distinguished themselves, even at the *cost* of offering their martyrs, in the task of evangelization: above all, the Dominicans, Franciscans, Augustinians, Mercedarians and then the Jesuits, who made the tender plant grow into a spreading tree. The fact is that the soil of America was prepared to receive the new Christian seeds by movements of spirituality of its own.

Nor is it a question, moreover, of a spreading of the faith detached from the life of those for whom it was intended; although it must always keep its essential reference to God. Therefore the Church in this island was the first to demand justice and to promote the defence of human rights in the lands that were opening to evangelization.

Lessons of humanism, spirituality and effort to raise man's dignity, are taught to us by Antonio Montesinos, Córdoba, Bartolomé de las Casas, echoed also in other parts by Juan de Zumárraga, Motolinia, Vasco de Quiroga, José de Anchieta, Toribio de Mogrovejo, Nóbrega and so many others. They are men in whom pulsates concern for the weak, for the defenceless, for the natives; subjects worthy of all respect as persons and as bearers of the image of God, destined for a

transcendent vocation. The first International Law has its origin here with Francisco de Vitoria.

3. The fact is that the proclamation of the Gospel and human advancement cannot be dissociated— this is the great lesson, valid also today. But for the Church, the former cannot be confused or exhausted, as some people claim, in the latter. That would be to close to man infinite spaces that God has opened to him. And it would be to distort the deep and complete meaning of evangelization, which is above all the proclamation of the Good News of Christ the Saviour.

The Church, an expert in humanity, faithful to the signs of the times, and in obedience to the pressing call of the last Council, wishes to continue today her mission of faith and defence of human rights. She calls upon Christians to commit themselves to the construction of a more just, human, and habitable world, which is not shut up within itself, but opens to God.

To construct this more just world means, among other things, making every effort in order that there will be no children without sufficient food, without education, without instruction; that there will be no young people without a suitable preparation; that, in order to live and to develop in a worthy way, there will be no peasants without land; that there *will* be no workers ill-treated or deprived of their rights; that there will be no systems that permit the exploitation of man by man or by the State; that there will be no corruption; that there will be no persons living in superabundance, while others through no fault of their own lack everything; that there will not be so many families badly formed, broken, disunited, receiving insufficient care; that there will be no injustice and inequality in the administration of justice; that there will be no one without the protection of the law, and that law will protect all alike; that force will not prevail over truth and law, but truth and law over force; and that economic or political matters will never prevail over human matters.

4. But do not be content with this more human world. Make a world that is explicitly more divine, more in accordance with God, ruled by faith, and in which this latter inspires the moral, religious, and social progress of man. Do not lose sight of the vertical dimension of evangelization. It has strength to liberate man, since it is the revelation of love. The love of the Father for men, for one and all; a love revealed in Jesus Christ. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." (Jn 3:16.)

Jesus Christ manifested this love above all in his hidden life—"He has done all things well" (Mk 7:37)—and by proclaiming the Gospel; then, by his death and resurrection, the paschal mystery in which man meets with his definitive vocation to eternal life, to union with God. This is the eschatological dimension of love.

Beloved Sons: I conclude by exhorting you always to be worthy of the faith that you have received. Love Christ, love man through him, and live devotion to our beloved Mother in heaven, whom you invoke with the beautiful name of Our Lady de la Altagracia (of the High Grace) and to whom the

Pope wishes to leave a diadem as a homage of devotion. May she help you to walk towards Christ, preserving and fully developing the seed planted by your first evangelizers. This is what the Pope hopes from all of you. From you, sons of Cuba, present here, from you sons of Jamaica, Curaçao and the Antilles, Haiti, Venezuela, and the United States. Above all, from you, sons of the Dominican land.

Amen.

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