



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
TO THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC,
MEXICO AND THE BAHAMAS

EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II *Puebla de Los Angeles (Mexico), Palafox Major Seminary*
Sunday, 28 January 1979

Beloved Sons and Daughters,

Puebla de los Angeles: today the sonorous and expressive name of your city is on millions of lips throughout Latin America and all over the world. Your city becomes a symbol and sign for the Latin-American Church. It is here, in fact, that from today the Bishops of the whole Continent, convened by the Successor of Peter, gather to reflect on the mission of Pastors in this part of the world, in this extraordinary hour of history.

The Pope has desired to come up to this high place from where the whole of Latin America seems to open up. And it is with the impression of contemplating the picture of each one of the nations that the Pope has wished to celebrate the Eucharistic Sacrifice on this altar erected on the mountains, to invoke on this Conference, on its participants and on its work, the light, the warmth and all the gifts of the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

There is nothing more natural and necessary than to invoke him on this occasion. The great Assembly which is opening is, in fact, an ecclesial meeting in its deepest essence: ecclesial because of those who meet here, the Pastors of the Church of God in Latin America; ecclesial because of the subject it studies, the mission of the Church in the continent; ecclesial because of its aims: to make more living and effective the original contribution that the Church has the duty of making to the welfare, the harmony, the justice and peace of these peoples. Well, there is no ecclesial Assembly if the Spirit of God is not there in the fullness of his mysterious action.

The Pope invokes him with all the fervour of his heart. May the place where the Bishops meet be a new Upper Room, much larger than the one in Jerusalem, where the Apostles were only eleven in number that morning, but, like that in Jerusalem, open to the call of the Paraclete and to the strength of a renewed Pentecost. May the Spirit accomplish in you Bishops, gathered here, the multiform mission that the Lord Jesus entrusted to him: as *interpreter of God* to make understood his plan and his word, which are inaccessible to mere human reason (cf. Jn 14:26), may he open the understanding of these Pastors and introduce them to the Truth (cf. Jn 16:13); as *witness of Jesus Christ*, may he give witness in their conscience and heart and transform them in turn into consistent, credible, and efficacious witnesses during their work (cf. Jn 15:26); as *Counsellor or Comforter*, may he instil courage against the sin of the world (cf. Jn 16:8) and put on their lips what they must say, particularly at the moment when testimony costs suffering and fatigue.

So I ask you, beloved sons and daughters, to unite with me in this Eucharist, in this invocation to the Spirit. It is not for their own sake or out of personal interest that the Bishops, from all parts of the continent, are meeting here; it is for you, People of God in these lands, and for your good. So take part in this third Conference also in this way: by asking every day for the abundance of the Holy Spirit for one and all of them.

It has been said, in a beautiful and profound way, that our God in his deepest mystery is not a solitude, but a family, since he has in himself fatherhood, sonship and the essence of the family, which is love. This subject of the family is not, therefore, extraneous to the subject of the Holy Spirit. Allow the Pope to say some words to you on this subject of the family—which will certainly occupy the Bishops during these days.

You know that the Conference of Medellin spoke of the family in pithy and urgent terms. In that year 1968, the Bishops saw, in your profound sentiment for the family, a fundamental feature of your Latin-American culture. They showed that, for the good of your countries, Latin-American families should always have three dimensions: education in the faith formation of persons, promotion of development. They also emphasized the serious obstacles that families meet with in carrying out this threefold task. "For this reason" they recommended pastoral attention for families, as one of the prior considerations of the Church in the continent.

Ten years later, the Church in Latin America feels happy at everything it has been able to do in favour of the family. But it humbly recognizes how much still remains to be done, while it perceives that the family apostolate, far from having lost its character of priority, is more urgent than ever today, as a very important element in evangelization.

The Church is aware, in fact, that the family is up against serious problems in Latin America in these times. Recently some countries have introduced divorce into their legislation, which brings a new threat to the integrity of the family. In most of your countries it is a lamentable fact that an alarming number of children, the future of these nations and the hope for the future, are born in

homes without any stability or, as they are called, in "incomplete families". Moreover, in certain places of the "Continent of Hope", this same hope runs the risk of vanishing, since it grows within families many of which cannot live normally owing to the particular impact upon them of the most negative effects of development: really depressing indices of unhealthiness, poverty and even want, ignorance and illiteracy, inhuman housing conditions, chronic malnutrition and so many other realities that are no less sad.

In defence of the family against these evils, the Church undertakes to give her help, and calls upon governments to take as the key point of their action an intelligent policy with regard to society and the family, a bold and persevering one, recognizing that the future—the hope—of the continent certainly lies here. It should be added that this family policy must not be understood as an indiscriminate effort to reduce the birth rate at all costs—which my predecessor Paul VI called "reducing the number of guests at the banquet of life"—when it is well known that a balanced birth rate is indispensable even for development. It is a question of uniting efforts to create conditions favourable to the existence of healthy and balanced families: "to increase the food on the table", to use again an expression of Paul VI.

As well as of defence of the family, we must also speak of advancement of the family. Many organisms have to contribute to this promotion: governments and governmental organisms, the school, the trade unions, the media of social communication, groups in poor districts, the various voluntary or spontaneous associations which flourish everywhere today.

The Church must also offer her contribution in the line of her spiritual mission of proclaiming the Gospel and leading men to salvation, which also has an enormous repercussion on the welfare of the family. And what can the Church do, uniting her efforts with those of others? I am certain that your bishops will endeavour to *give* this question adequate, just, and efficacious answers. I point out to you how valuable is what the Church is already doing in Latin America for the family; for example: to prepare fiancés for marriage; to help families when, in the course of their existence, they go through normal crises which, if wisely guided, may even be fruitful and enriching; to make each Christian family a real "domestic church", with all the rich content of this expression; to prepare many families for the mission of evangelizing other families; to emphasize all values of family life; to help incomplete families; to stimulate the rulers to bring forth in their countries that family social policy of which we were just speaking. The Puebla Conference will certainly support these initiatives and perhaps suggest others. We are happy to think that the history of Latin America will thus have reasons to thank the Church for all that it has done, is doing, and will do for the family in this vast continent.

Beloved sons and daughters: now, beside this altar, the Successor of Peter feels particularly close to all Latin-American families. It is as if every home were to open and the Pope were able to enter into each of them; houses where there is no lack of bread or prosperity but where, perhaps, harmony and joy are lacking; houses where families live far more modestly and uncertain of the

morrow, helping one another to lead a hard but dignified existence; poor houses in the suburbs of your cities, where there is much hidden suffering although there exists in the midst of them the simple gaiety of the poor; humble huts of peasants, natives, emigrants, etc. For each family in particular the Pope would like to be able to say a word of encouragement and hope. You families that can enjoy prosperity, do not shut yourselves up in your happiness; open to others to distribute what is superfluous for you and what others lack. Families oppressed by poverty, do not lose heart, and, without taking luxury as your ideal, or riches as the principle of happiness, seek with the help of all to overcome difficult moments while waiting for better days. Families visited and tormented by physical or moral pain, sorely tried by sickness or want, do not add to these sufferings bitterness or despair, but temper sorrow with hope. All families of Latin America, be sure that the Pope knows you and wishes to know you even better because he loves you with a father's tenderness.

This is, in the framework of the Pope's visit to Mexico, the Day of the Family. Receive then, Latin-American families, with your presence here, round the altar, by means of radio or television, receive the visit that the Pope wishes to make to each one. And give the Pope the joy of seeing you grow in the Christian values that are yours, in order that Latin America may find in its millions of families reasons to trust, to hope, to struggle and to build.

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