



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC PILGRIMAGE TO INDIA

MASS AT "INDIRA GANDHI" STADIUM OF DELHI

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Saturday, 1 February 1986

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. This afternoon, Jesus Christ repeats to us the words of the Gospel: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" .

At the beginning of my pilgrimage to the shrine which is the People of God living in this vast land of India, I wish to recall these words of Jesus Christ from today's Liturgy. These words speak of our pilgrimage through faith. Through faith we journey towards God along this path which is Christ.

He is the Son of God and he is of the same substance as the Father. God from God and Light from Light, he became Man, in order to be for us the path to the Father. He unceasingly spoke to the Father during his earthly life. To him, to the Father, he directed the thoughts and hearts of his listeners. In a certain sense he shared with them the Fatherhood of God, and this was shown in a special way in the prayer that he taught his disciples: the Our Father.

At the end of his Messianic mission on earth, on the day before his Passion and death he says to the Apostles: "In my Father's house there are many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?".

If the Gospel is the revelation of the truth that human life is a pilgrimage towards the Father's house, then it is at one and the same time a call to the faith through which we travel as pilgrims: a call to pilgrim faith. Christ says: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life".

2. Yes, human life on earth is a pilgrimage. We are all conscious of passing through the world. Man's life begins and ends, starts at birth and goes on to the moment of death. Man is a being who is transitory. And in this pilgrimage of life, religion assists man to live in such a way as to reach his goal. Man is constantly confronted with the transitory nature of a life which he knows is extremely important as a preparation for everlasting life. Man's pilgrim faith orients him to God and directs him to make those choices which will assist him to reach eternal life. Hence every moment of man's earthly pilgrimage is important – important in its challenges and choices.

Closely touching man in his pilgrimage is the reality of human culture. The Second Vatican Council has insisted that "there are many links between the message of salvation and human culture. For God, revealing himself to his people to the extent of a full manifestation of himself in his Incarnate Son, has spoken according to the culture proper to different ages" . And again: "Christians, on pilgrimage towards the heavenly city, should seek and savour the things which are above. This duty in no way decreases, but rather increases, the weight of their obligation to work with all men in constructing a more human world" .

The Church proclaims that man in his pilgrim life is all the more worthy of respect and love and care in the many circumstances of earthly living precisely because he is destined to live for ever. And all true human culture, taking into account the dignity of man and his final destiny, is an aid to man in his noble and righteous living, in this land of pilgrimage. Saint Paul himself presents to the Christian community this invitation: "Whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence? if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things".

3. As man on this earth passes from birth to death he is aware of being a pilgrim of the Absolute. Here in India this consciousness is very deep. Your ancient sages have expressed the anguished cry of the soul for the Absolute. There is indeed an age-old yearning for the infinite, a constant awareness of the divine presence and endless manifestations of religious feelings through popular feasts and festivals.

And in the very quest for the Absolute there is already an experience of the divine. Among all those who down the centuries have searched for God, we remember the famous Augustine of Hippo who, finding him, exclaimed: "Where, therefore, did I find you, in order to know you, if not in you, above me?" . In India this quest for God and this experience of him have been accompanied by great simplicity, asceticism and renunciation. All of this renders great honour to India as a religious natal generously committed to her spiritual pilgrimage.

4. In the Revelation of the Old and New Covenants, man living in the visible world, in the midst of temporal things, is at the same time profoundly aware of the presence of God, who penetrates his whole life. This living God is in fact the ultimate and definitive bulwark for man amidst all the trials and sufferings of earthly existence. He longs to possess this God definitively even as he

experiences his presence. He strives to attain to the vision of his face. In the words of the Psalmist: "Like the deer that yearns for running streams, so my soul is yearning for you, my God. My soul is thirsting for God, the God of my life; when can I enter and see the face of God?"

5. As man strives to know God, to perceive his face and experience his presence, God turns towards man to reveal his own life. The Second Vatican Council dwells at length on the importance of God's intervention in the world. It explains that "through divine revelation, God chose to show forth and communicate himself and the eternal decisions of his will regarding the salvation of men".

At the same time the merciful and loving God who communicates himself through revelation still remains for man an inscrutable mystery. And man, the pilgrim of the Absolute, continues throughout his life to seek the face of God. But at the end of the pilgrimage of faith, man comes to the "Father's house" and being in this "house" means seeing God "face to face".

6. This seeing God "face to face" is the deepest desire of the human spirit. How eloquent in this context are the words of the Apostle Philip in today's Gospel, when he says to Jesus: "Lord, show us the Father and we shall be satisfied".

Those words are indeed eloquent because they bear witness to the deepest thirst and desire of the human spirit, but more eloquent still is the answer that Jesus gives.

Jesus explains: "He who has seen me has seen the Father". Jesus is the revelation of the Father; he explains to the world what the Father is like, not because he is the Father, but because he is one with the Father in the communion of divine life. In the words of Jesus: "I am in the Father and the Father in me". Man no longer has to search all alone for God. In partnership with Christ, man discovers God and he discovers him in Christ.

7. In the Son, in Jesus Christ, God's self-revelation reaches its fullness and zenith. The author of the Letter to the Hebrews stressed this point when he wrote: "In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son". Therefore Christ is forever the way.

He is the way because he is the truth. He gives the ultimate answer to the question "Who is God?" The Apostle John testifies: "No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known". Through his Incarnation, Jesus Christ, as Son of God, makes known the love and kindness and mercy of the eternal God. And he does this as the Son of Mary, God made man, in a way that humanity can understand.

We "reach" God through the truth. Through the truth about God and through the truth about everything that is outside God: about creation, the macrocosm, and about man, the microcosm.

We “reach” God through the truth that Christ proclaims, through the truth that Christ actually is! We reach God in Christ who continues to repeat: “I am the truth”.

And this “reaching” God, through the truth which is Christ, is the source of life. It is the source of the eternal life which begins here on earth in the “darkness of faith”, to reach its fullness in the vision of God “face to face” – through the light of glory, as he actually is.

Christ brings this life, for he is the life – just as he says: “I am the life”. “I am the way, and the truth, and the life”.

8. “Why are you cast down, my soul?... Hope in God” . “Behold, we are now coming to the altar of God, to the God of our joy” .

We come here in order to celebrate the Eucharist. The Eucharist is the most holy Sacrament of our pilgrimage through faith. It is the nourishment for our journey. It is the banquet of life.

In it we are united with Christ who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. We make him present under the appearances of bread and wine in his Death and Resurrection. Our pilgrimage through faith has in the Eucharist its fullest and most expressive sign. And at the same time we unite ourselves with one another in fraternal community. We unite ourselves with the whole Church. We unite ourselves with all humanity and with the angels. We give back to God the whole of creation. Together with everyone we sing “Holy, holy, holy”!

And behold from the very heart of this Liturgy, from the heart of the Eucharist, we proclaim to all:

Rejoice! Rejoice with us! The Lord is near! Amen.

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