



# The Holy See

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APOSTOLIC PILGRIMAGE TO BANGLADESH, SINGAPORE, FIJI ISLANDS,  
NEW ZEALAND, AUSTRALIA AND SEYCHELLES

## *HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II*

*Canberra (Australia), 24 November 1986*

*"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good tidings . . ."*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

1. These are Jesus' words at the beginning of his saving mission. He returned to the synagogue at Nazareth where he had been brought up, and there he proclaimed these same words that we have heard in today's Liturgy. Then he added: "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing". It is at the beginning of his public life and of the messianic mission for which he had come into the world.

And from then on Jesus continues to preach the Good News, a message of salvation and radical Christian freedom offered through the grace of God: "good news to the poor . . . release to the captives . . . recovering of sight to the blind . . . freedom for the oppressed . . . the acceptable year of the Lord".

2. Christ's messianic mission, proclaimed that day at Nazareth, does not stop. It continues to be communicated through the Church. It has taken root among the peoples and nations of every continent.

In the name of that mission the Successor of Peter has come today to the capital city of Australia. Like my predecessor Paul VI, who, sixteen years ago, was the first Pope to visit Australia, I come as a pilgrim of faith. It is appropriate that this pilgrimage should begin in Canberra, the national

capital and itself a symbol of this young and vigorous society.

In the love of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, I come before you, my brothers and sisters in Australia. While everything around us speaks of newness, I am very much aware of the great antiquity of this land and of its indigenous people whose origins stretch back beyond recorded history. At the beginning of my stay with you I express my respect and esteem for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island peoples, and I assure them of my friendship.

I greet the bishops – especially you, Archbishop Carroll – and all the priests, religious and lay people who are here and who represent at this Eucharistic celebration the entire Church in this land. I express my heartfelt union in prayer with the members of all the Christian Churches and Ecclesial Communities. I greet the distinguished representatives of Australia's public life. And in this assembly I embrace the entire country: the young and the old, the weak and the strong, those who believe and those whose hearts are weighed down by doubt. I embrace you all and offer you to our heavenly Father.

3. The explorers who set forth from Europe with such courage in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had already suspected the existence of a great land mass in the South. Some of them called this unknown land "The South Land of the Holy Spirit". The early navigators plotted the course of their southern voyages by the brilliant stars. They rejoiced to see in the night sky a constellation with five points of light in the shape of a cross. The Southern Cross not only shines above you in the sky; it stands as your national symbol, everywhere visible on your flag. It is a constant reminder to people of faith that the Cross of Christ is at the heart of our earthly existence and guarantees our heavenly destiny. The Holy Spirit and the Cross both recall that the saving death of Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit are present in the very heart of our human history, and consequently in the history of Australia.

It was the power of the Holy Spirit that sustained the Christian people in the early days of the colony, and kept them faithful to the traditions of their faith. And it was the impelling love of Christ, seen most clearly on the Cross, that moved the first chaplains and priests to minister to convicts and free settlers alike with such courage and endurance, often in great isolation and loneliness. It was the Holy Spirit, bringing understanding across the barriers of division and suspicion, that stirred the heart of the first Anglican chaplain, the Reverend Richard Johnson, to welcome a group of Spanish priests visiting Sydney in 1793 with, in their own words, "kindness and humility, and a simplicity that was truly evangelical".

Heroic witnesses of Christ like love from those early years, whose memory and example should never be forgotten, are Archbishop John Bede Polding, Caroline Chisholm and Mother Mary MacKillop. They too were moved with compassion by what they saw around them. Selflessly they served Christ in the convicts, in distressed and unprotected women, the Aboriginal women, and the scattered flock of the interior. The Christian pioneers of the nineteenth century truly shared the

sufferings of Christ and experienced the power of his Resurrection. They sacrificed and laboured hard, in those frugal days before there was the abundance that Australia has now come to enjoy, to build churches and schools, so that the truth of Christ would be taught, handed on and lived in this land.

These outstanding people of faith loved Mary the Mother of God with a special devotion, and found in her example of faith and humble service the strength to persevere and remain faithful. Father Therry placed the original Saint Mary's in Sydney, the mother church of Australia, under the protection of Mary as Our Lady Help of Christians. In 1847, my predecessor Pius IX named her the spiritual Patroness of Australia.

4. Like the great throng of witnesses who have gone before us, we must not lose sight of Jesus. The challenge to follow him today is not quite what the pioneers faced yesterday. But the means to genuine discipleship and witness remain the same for every generation: the surpassing knowledge and love of Christ.

In today's Gospel we hear Jesus say to the Apostles: "Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many rooms . . . And when I go and prepare a place for you I will come again and will take you to myself".

Jesus – the One whom the Father has anointed and sent into the world – leads us back to "the Father's house". This phrase speaks to us about the final dimension of our human destiny. The Gospel message of the saving Death and Resurrection of Christ leading to eternal life reveals the true meaning of our existence. It helps us to understand what is really at stake in human life. Jesus' words – "that where I am you may be also" – are the definitive challenge and the ultimate meaning of our human endeavours.

Rightly, the Apostle Thomas expresses the anxiety which we all feel when we meditate on what Jesus is saving. He asks: "How can we know the way?". And it is precisely in answer to this question that Jesus expresses the full meaning of his messianic role: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life". These are the words chosen as the theme of my visit to Australia. It is appropriate that during this liturgical celebration we reflect on their meaning for our lives.

5. Jesus is our Way. The way of Jesus through life was not one of his own choosing but the one the Father had chosen for him. He followed it unswervingly and humbly, even to death on the Cross. In so doing, Jesus became the way for us. Only loving acceptance like his leads to the Father. We follow the way that is Jesus when, like him, we let the Father lead us back to himself by the paths that he knows are best for us. Our lives begin in this world of time, but their destination is eternity. "Our homeland is in heaven", and "we look for things that are in heaven where Christ is". To live as though this visible and transitory world were all we have is to lose our way.

We are pilgrims progressing from time to eternity, and our goal is the Father himself. He constantly calls us beyond what is familiar and comfortable to new paths of faith and trust. As we draw nearer, he sometimes seems to draw away, but only because he is a mysterious God whose thoughts are not our thoughts, whose ways are not our ways. Like Abraham, we must go forward, not knowing where we are being led. Like Abraham, and Jesus after him, we must constantly turn towards the Father, who is faithful, and trust him. Moment by moment, if we respond to the Father's love, he will bring us unerringly, through Jesus, to himself.

6. Jesus is our Truth. He himself stated that everything he said he had learned from his Father. "The Father who sent me has himself given me commandment what to say and what to speak". And since the Father's word is truth, Jesus speaks the truth. In fact Jesus is the truth. For he is everything the Father has to say: he is the Father's Word. Only he can restore true sight to our distorted vision so that we can see and know God, ourselves and our world in truth. In the truth that is Jesus we know God as a Father of infinite love and mercy. We know all people as the Father's very own children "to whom he has been pleased to give the kingdom", that is, his very self. In Jesus, we see all the Father's children called into a wonderful unity and peace: "no longer Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female, but all one in Christ". Only in the truth that is Jesus can we hope to acknowledge, defend and promote the dignity, freedom and integral well-being of the human person.

7. Finally, Jesus is our Life. By emptying himself on the Cross he received the fullness of the Father's gift: "All that I have is yours, and all you have is mine". Lifted up on the Cross before the world, Jesus is filled with life by the Father and raised up to be the source of life for all who believe in him. Life is always the Father's gift, and those who receive it must reverence all life, especially human life in all stages of its development, and abhor all violence against it.

In the Eucharist, through the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus is present, given up in death and raised to life; he is present as the source of life for those who come to him. "As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me". In this Eucharist which we are celebrating in the capital of Australia, Jesus our Way, our Truth and our Life offers himself to the Father for the salvation of the world. He takes to himself our hopes and our joys, our sufferings and anxieties, and in return he gives us the strength to follow his Way, to live by his Truth, and to experience his Life. This is his gift to the Australian people!

8. This Mass is being offered for peace and justice. We recognize, in other words, that Jesus leads us to the Father's house along paths which pass through a world that needs redemption – a world profoundly disturbed by the effects of selfishness, violence and sin. Humbly, then, we ask God's blessings of peace and justice for our selves and for the entire human family. We cannot forget the people far away from us. We cannot forget our brothers and sisters who are suffering and need our help – wherever they may be.

In this International Year of Peace, many appeals have been made, many initiatives have been proposed, and people almost everywhere have expressed their desire for peace. At Assisi recently I joined with the representatives of different Christian Churches and Ecclesial Communities, as well as representatives of non-Christian religions, in order to implore this great gift from God. We cannot doubt that it is his will that people should live in peace. Yet we are aware – in the words of Paul VI – that "true peace must be founded on justice, upon a sense of the intangible dignity of man, upon the recognition of an abiding and happy equality between individuals, upon the basic principle of human brotherhood, that is, of the respect and love due to each human being, because he is human".

It is here that we fail. Justice is so often lacking between individuals, between groups, and nations, and blocs of nations.

In contrast, Christ's messianic mission is one of peace and justice. He came "to bring good tidings . . . to bind up the brokenhearted . . . to proclaim liberty to the captives . . . to comfort all who mourn . . .". Peace can develop only where the requirements of universal justice are fulfilled.

Dear brothers and sisters: let us ask Christ, "the Way, the Truth and the Life", to teach us the path of peace and justice. Let us ask him to convince us that our common humanity requires solidarity among us, and love and respect for human life everywhere.

9. Let us also pray that, through the service of the Bishop of Rome, the Successor of Peter, the whole Church in Australia will be united ever more closely with Christ, "the Way, the Truth and the Life".

As the Letter to the Galatians reminds us: "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ . . . you are all one in Christ Jesus . . . In Christ Jesus you are all children of God, through faith". Together we are on the way to the Father's house.

Look, dear people of Australia, and behold this vast continent of yours! It is your home! The place of your joys and your pains, your endeavours and your hopes! And for all of you, Australians, the Way to the Father's house passes through this land.

*Jesus Christ is the Way!*

*And he is your Truth and your Life! "Jesus Christ . . . yesterday, today and for ever!". Amen.*

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