



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO SARAJEVO (APRIL 12-13, 1997)

MASS AT KOSEVO STADIUM

HOMILY OF THE HOLY FATHER

13 April 1997

"We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 Jn 2:1).

1. We have an advocate who speaks in our name. Who is this advocate who makes himself our spokesman? Today's liturgy offers a comprehensive answer: *"We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 Jn 2:1).*

We read in the Acts of the Apostles: "The God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus" (Acts 3:13). He is the one who was betrayed and denied by his own people, even when Pilate wanted to free him. They asked for a murderer, Barabbas, to be reprieved in his place. In this way the Author of life was sentenced to death (cf. Acts 3:13-15).

But "God raised him from the dead" (cf. Acts 3:15). These are the words of Peter who was an eyewitness of Christ's Passion, Death and Resurrection. It was as a witness that he was sent to the children of Israel and to all the nations of the world. But when he speaks to his own people, he not only accuses but also excuses: "Brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers" (Acts 3:17).

Peter is a witness aware of the truth about the Messiah who, on the Cross, brought to fulfilment the ancient prophecies: *Jesus Christ has become the advocate with the Father, the advocate of the chosen people and of all humanity.*

Saint John adds: "We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the expiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 Jn 2:1-2). This truth is repeated to you today by the Successor of Peter, who has finally come among you. People of Sarajevo and of all Bosnia-Hercegovina, I come today to tell you: you have an advocate with God. His name is Jesus Christ the righteous!

2. Peter and John, as well as the other Apostles, became witnesses of this truth, for they saw with their own eyes the Crucified and Risen Christ. He had come among them in the Upper Room, showing them the wounds of his Passion; he had let them touch him so that from their own experience they would be convinced that he was that same Jesus whom they had known before as "the Master". And in order to confirm beyond any doubt the truth of his Resurrection, he accepted the food that they offered him, eating it with them as he had done so many Times New Roman before his death.

Jesus had kept his own identity, despite the extraordinary transformation wrought in him after his Resurrection. And he keeps that identity still. He is the same today as he was yesterday, and he will remain the same for ever (cf. Heb 13:8). As such, as true Man, *he is the advocate of all people with the Father*. Indeed, he is the advocate of all creation, redeemed by him and in him.

He stands before the Father as the most expert and competent witness of what, by his Cross and Resurrection, has been accomplished in the history of humanity and of the world. His is the language of redemption, that is, of liberation from the slavery of sin. Jesus addresses the Father as the Consubstantial Son, and at the same time as true man, speaking the language of all human generations and of the whole of human history: the language of victories and defeats, of all the sufferings and all the sorrows of individual men and women, of the individual peoples and nations of the whole earth.

Christ speaks your language, dear Brothers and Sisters of Bosnia- Hercegovina, a land so long and grievously tried. He said: "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer"; but he added: "and on the third day rise from the dead . . . You are witnesses of these things" (Lk 24:46,48). *Sarajevo, Bosnia- Hercegovina, arise! You have an advocate with God. His name is Jesus Christ the righteous!*

3. *Sarajevo*: a city that has become a symbol, in a certain sense *the symbol of the twentieth century*. In 1914, the name Sarajevo came to be associated the outbreak of the First World War. At the end of this same century, there is linked with the name of this city the painful experience of the war that, in the course of five long years, has left behind in this region a terrible wake of death and destruction.

During this period, the name of your city has not ceased to occupy the news reports and to be the subject of political interventions by leaders of nations, strategists and generals. The entire world

has continued to speak of Sarajevo in historical, political and military terms. Nor did the Pope fail to raise his voice concerning this tragic war, and many Times New Roman and in different circumstances he has had on his lips and always in his heart the name of your city. For several years he ardently desired to be able to come among you in person.

Today, finally, that desire has been fulfilled. The Lord be thanked! The words with which I offer you my affectionate greeting are the ones which Christ, after the Resurrection, spoke to the disciples: "Peace to you" (Lk 24:36). Peace to you, men and women of Sarajevo! Peace to you, people of Bosnia-Herzegovina! Peace to you, Brothers and Sisters of this beloved land!

I greet Cardinal Vinko Puljic, the devoted Bishop of this local Church, and I thank him for the words of welcome and communion that he has addressed to me also on behalf of his Auxiliary, Bishop Pero Sudar, and of all present. I greet the esteemed and courageous Bishop Franjo Komarica, with his faithful people from the Diocese of Banja Luka, as also the esteemed and zealous Bishop Ratko Peric, with the faithful from the Dioceses of Mostar-Duvno and Trebinje-Mrkan.

I greet the Cardinals and Bishops present and all of you — priests, consecrated persons, laity. My respectful thoughts go also to the civil authorities and the diplomats gathered here, and to the representatives of other Religious Confessions who have honoured us with their presence.

The peace that Jesus gives to his disciples is not the peace imposed by conquerors on the conquered, by the stronger on the weaker. It does not receive its legitimacy by force of arms but, on the contrary, is born of love. The love of God for man and the love of man for man. God's commandment resounds loud and clear today: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart . . . you shall love your neighbour as yourself" (Dt 6:5; Lv 19:18). Upon these two firm foundations the peace that has been achieved can be consolidated and built up. And "blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called sons of God" (Mt 5:9).

4. As the servant of the Gospel, the Pope, in union with the Bishops of Bosnia- Herzegovina and with the whole Church, wishes to reveal a still more profound dimension hidden in the reality of the life of this region, for which the whole world has been concerned for years.

Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, your history, your sufferings, the experiences of the years marked by war, which we hope will never return, have an advocate with God: Jesus Christ, who alone is righteous. In him, the many dead, whose tombs have multiplied in this land; those who are mourned by their mothers, their widows, their orphaned children: they have an advocate with God. Who else can be, with God, an advocate for all these sufferings and all these tribulations? Who else can fully understand this page of your history, Sarajevo? Who can fully understand this page of your history, O Balkan nations, and of your history, O Europe?

It cannot be forgotten that *Sarajevo has become the symbol of the suffering of the whole of Europe*. It was so at the beginning of the 1900s, when the First World War had its beginning here; it was so in a different way this second time, when the conflict took place entirely in this region of yours. Europe took part in it as a witness. But we must ask ourselves: was it always a fully responsible witness? This question cannot be avoided. Statesmen, politicians, military men, scholars and people of culture must try to give an answer. The hope of all people of good will is that what Sarajevo symbolizes will remain confined to the twentieth century, and that its tragedies will not be repeated in the Millennium about to begin.

5. For this reason we turn our gaze trustingly to Divine Providence. We ask the Prince of Peace, through the intercession of Mary his Mother, so loved by the peoples of this entire region, that Sarajevo may become a model of coexistence and peaceful cooperation between peoples of different ethnic origins and religions for the whole of Europe.

Gathered in the celebration of Christ's sacrifice, we do not cease thanking you, City so sorely tried, and you, Brothers and Sisters who live in this land of Bosnia-Herzegovina, for in some way, by your sacrifice, you have taken upon yourselves the weight of this terrible experience, in which all have a share. I repeat to you: we have an advocate with God, he is Christ, the only righteous one.

Before you, O Crucified and Risen Christ, there come today Sarajevo and all Bosnia-Herzegovina, with the heavy burden of its history. You are our great advocate. This people implores you, to permeate the painful history experienced here with the power of your Redemption. You, incarnate Son of God, walk as Man among the events of people and nations. Walk through the history of this people and of these peoples most closely linked to the name of Sarajevo, to the name of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

6. Dear Brothers and Sisters! When in 1994 I wanted so intensely to come here among you, I referred to a thought that had come to be extraordinarily significant at a crucial moment of European history: "Let us forgive and let us ask for forgiveness". It was said then that the time was not yet right. Has not that time now come?

I return today, therefore, to this thought and to the words, which I wish to repeat, so that they can come into the minds of all those who are united in the painful experience of your city and land, of all the peoples and nations torn apart by war: *"Let us forgive and let us ask for forgiveness". If Christ is to be our advocate with the Father, we cannot fail to utter these words. We cannot fail to undertake the difficult but necessary pilgrimage of forgiveness, which leads to a profound reconciliation.*

"Offer forgiveness and receive peace", I recalled in this year's [Message for the World Day of Peace](#); and I added: "Forgiveness, in its truest and highest form, is a free act of love" (No. 5), as was the reconciliation offered by God to man through the Cross and Death of his incarnate Son,

he the only righteous one. Of course, "forgiveness, far from precluding the search for truth, actually requires it", because an "essential requisite for forgiveness and reconciliation is justice" (*ibid.*). But it still remains true that "*asking and granting forgiveness is something profoundly worthy of man*" (*ibid.*, 4).

*7. While the light of this truth appears clearly today,
my thoughts turn to you, Mother of the Crucified and Risen Christ,
to you who are loved and venerated in so many shrines of this tormented land.
Implore for all believers the gift of a new heart!
Let forgiveness, a key word of the Gospel, become a reality here.
Holding firmly to the Cross of Christ,
the Church gathered today in Sarajevo asks this of you,
O clement, O loving,
Mother of God and our Mother,
O sweet Virgin Mary!
Amen.*