



# The Holy See

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## APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II TO CROATIA

### *HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II*

*Sportive Airport of Osijek/Čepin*

*Saturday, 7 June 2003*

1. "I beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called" (Eph 4:1). Saint Paul wrote these words to the Ephesians. His exhortation, dear brothers and sisters, resounds today in our assembly with particular timeliness.

But *what is the vocation of a Christian?* The answer is demanding, but clear: *the vocation of Christian is holiness.* It is a vocation which has its roots in Baptism and is proposed anew by the other sacraments, and principally by the Eucharist.

Dear brothers and sisters of the Dioceses of Djakovo and Srijem, the Bishop of Rome has come among you today in order to remind you, in the name of the Lord, that you are called to holiness in every season of life: in the spring of youth, in the summer of maturity, then in the autumn and winter of old age, and at last at the hour of death and even beyond death, in the final purification preordained by God's merciful love.

2. I wish to recall this fundamental truth today, as I celebrate together with you *the solemn conclusion of the second Synod* of your local Church, to which you have devoted almost five years of prayer and reflection on the theme: "You are the Christ, for us and for all men and women." May the Synod produce abundant fruits for a renewal of Christian commitment in this land which is firmly linked to the See of Peter. Indeed, today, 7 June, is the anniversary of the letters sent in 879 by Pope John VIII to Prince Branimir and to Bishop Theodosius, which mark a significant date in your history

I cordially greet your Bishop, *Marin Srakić*, and I thank him for his words of welcome at the opening of this liturgical celebration. Together with him I greet your *Auxiliary Bishops* and your Bishop Emeritus, *Ćiril Kos*. I embrace with affection the Bishops and all the faithful of the Dioceses of the *Ecclesiastical Province of Zagreb*, which is celebrating the hundredth and fiftieth anniversary of its establishment. My thoughts also go to the pilgrims who have come with their Pastors from Bosnia-Hercegovina, from Hungary, and from Serbia and Montenegro.

In this city of Osijek, I wish to recall Cardinal *Franjo Šeper*, who was born here. A faithful servant of the Church, he was my valued co-worker as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith at the beginning of my Pontificate.

I greet our brothers and sisters who share with us faith in Jesus, the Son of God and the one Saviour of the world. In particular I greet *Metropolitan Jovan* and the other Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church. I ask them to convey to His Beatitude *Patriarch Pavle* my fraternal greetings in the love of Christ. My greeting also goes to our brothers and sisters of the *Communities born of the Reformation*.

I also offer respectful greetings to the members of the *Jewish Community* and to the followers of *Islam*. Finally my respectful greetings go to the *civil and military Authorities*, whom I thank most heartily for their commitment to the preparation of this Pastoral Visit.

3. "I appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide" (Jn 15:16). How can we not be grateful to God for the clearer awareness which, in the years following the Second Vatican Council, *the lay faithful* – men and women alike – have gained of the baptismal dignity that is theirs? Christ's followers can never cultivate sufficiently the awareness of their proper identity. This in fact is the model for their mission.

Consequently there are *essential questions* to which we continually need to respond: What have I done with my Baptism and my Confirmation? Is Christ truly the centre of my life? Do I give space to prayer during my day? Do I live my life as a vocation and a mission?

4. At the beginning of the third millennium God is calling believers, and *the laity in particular*, to a *renewed missionary outreach*. Mission is not "something added on" to the Christian vocation. Indeed, the Council states that the Christian vocation is *by its very nature* a vocation to the apostolate (cf. *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 2).

Dear brothers and sisters, the Church in Slavonia and Srijem *has need of you!* After the trying times of the war, which has left the people of this region with deep wounds not yet completely healed, a commitment to reconciliation, solidarity and social justice calls for courage on the part of individuals inspired by faith, open to brotherly love and concerned for defending the dignity of the human person made in the image of God.

Dear lay faithful, men and women, you are called to *assume generously your own share of responsibility* for the life of the ecclesial communities to which you belong. The image which parishes present, as places of welcome and of mission, also depends upon you. As sharers in the priestly, prophetic and royal office of Christ (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 34-36), enriched by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, you can make your contribution in the areas of liturgy and catechesis, and in the promotion of missionary and charitable initiatives of various kinds. *No baptized person can remain idle!*

Do not grow discouraged in the face of complex situations! Seek in prayer the source of all strength for the apostolate and draw from the Gospel the light to guide your steps.

5. "Great is the Lord in all his works," proclaims the Responsorial Psalm. On my flight to Osijek, I was able to admire the beauty of the plain of Slavonia – known as "the granary of Croatia" – and my thoughts naturally turned to the *field workers*, so numerous in this region. I greet them with particular affection.

Dear brothers and sisters, I know that your life is a hard one and that the yield of the earth's fruits does not at times match the hard work which is demanded of you. I also know that farm work has its own serious difficulties: it has lost a part of its value and young people were already choosing urban life even before the last war, which left many villages with scarcely any inhabitants.

I invite you to not lose confidence and to bear in mind that by your manual work – which eloquently recalls the Biblical duty entrusted to man of "subduing" the earth and to "having dominion" over the visible world (cf. Gen 1:28) – *you are daily "cooperators" of God the Creator*. Know that the Pope and the Church are close to you and, with great esteem for the importance and dignity of your daily toil, they pray that agriculture and field workers, both men and women, will receive due recognition within the overall development of the community (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 67; *Laborem Exercens*, 21).

6. The Apostle Paul has reminded us that there is "one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all" (Eph 4:6). It is he, God the Father, who calls all of us to holiness and to mission. By experiencing fully the newness of Easter, Christians can transform the world and build the civilization of truth and love. To him, who reigns in glory in every age be praise, glory and honour!

I commend you to Mary, the Spouse of Joseph and the Mother of Jesus, whom you greatly venerate at the shrines of Aljmaš and Voćin. May she be your teacher and obtain for you the spirit of contemplation which was hers in Nazareth, the courageous strength which she showed at Calvary and the missionary openness to the Spirit which, together with the original community, she received at Pentecost. May Mary bring all of you to Jesus!

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