



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO CROATIA

MASS AT MIDDAY PRAYER

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Forum Square, Zadar

Monday, 9 June 2003

1. As my Apostolic Journey to Croatia draws to an end, I am happy to join you, the faithful of the Archdiocese of Zadar and neighbouring areas, here in Forum Square, in the shadow of the Cathedral of Saint Anastasia, the martyr from Sirmio. We are gathered here to celebrate *Midday Prayer, the hour of Sext*.

I greet you with affection in the name of the Lord, as I recall the presence of my predecessor, Pope Alexander III, who stopped in this city in March 1177 and visited several places in the vicinity. I greet your Archbishop, the Most Reverend *Ivan Prendja*, who has welcomed me in the name of all present, and Archbishop Emeritus *Marijan Oblak*, who took part with me in the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council. With fraternal affection I greet the *Bishops of Croatia*, who surround me today and have accompanied me throughout this Pastoral Visit. My greetings also go to the Serbian Orthodox Bishop of Dalmatia *Fotije*.

Lastly, I greet with respect the *President of the Republic*, whom I thank most heartily for being present at this gathering, and the other *civil and military authorities*, to whom I express my gratitude for everything that they have done to make my visit possible.

2. Our liturgical assembly takes place on the day after the [Solemnity of Pentecost](#), the day on which Croatians celebrate *the feast of Mary, Mother of the Church*. The reading we have just

heard portrays Mary in the Cenacle, surrounded by the early community. The small group, gathered in "the upper room" of the house (Acts 1:13), prays and waits. With the coming of the Holy Spirit the doors of the room will burst open and enable the Gospel proclamation to go out to the streets of Jerusalem, and then to set forth on the paths of the world.

As on the day of Pentecost, the Blessed Virgin has remained spiritually in the midst of the Christian faithful down the centuries, invoking the constant outpouring of the Spirit's gifts upon the Church as she faces the challenges which arise in different periods of her history.

In this way Mary carries out in its fullness *her mission as Mother*: she is Mother not only because she gave birth to and nurtured the Son of God; she is also Mother because she is "the Virgin who has become the Church," as *Saint Francis of Assisi* loved to call her (cf. *Fontes Francescani*, 259). Francis too passed through Zadar at the beginning of the thirteenth century, during his journey to the East and the Holy Land.

3. The Virgin Mary, gathering around herself the Apostles and the disciples who were tempted to disperse, *commended them to the "fire" of the Spirit* who would launch them on the adventure of mission. The "*sensus fidei*" of the Christian People would recognize Mary's active presence not only in the earliest community, but also throughout the Church's history. For this reason the Church has not hesitated to grant her the title of "Queen of the Apostles."

The Most Holy Virgin, who, in the words of the Evangelist Luke, "kept all these things, pondering them in her heart" (2:19), continues to set before the memory of believers the historical events which are the foundation of their faith. As a witness to the origins of the Church and the guarantor of the fidelity of Christians in every generation, Mary repeats in every age the words she spoke at the wedding feast of Cana: "Do whatever he tells you" (Jn 2:5).

4. Mary's words and example represent *a sublime school of life*, at which apostles are formed. Apostles in the past and apostles today. Mary continues to prepare them for mission by her assiduous prayer to the Father, by her closeness to her Son, and by her openness to the promptings of the Spirit.

It pleases me to know that this Archdiocese has witnessed in recent years the growth and expansion of *different forms of lay engagement and apostolate*. Dear brothers and sisters, learn from Mary how to be credible witnesses and generous apostles, as you make your own contribution to the great enterprise of the new evangelization. And never forget that a genuine apostolate demands as a prior condition a personal encounter with Jesus, the Living One, the Lord (cf. Rev 1:17-18).

5. Mary Most Holy remains *a model for all who hear the word of God and put it into practice* (cf. Lk 8:21). How then could there not be a profound spiritual understanding between all believers and

the Virgin of the *Magnificat*? The poor and the humble in every age were not mistaken when they made *Mary in silence* their Advocate and *Mary in service* their Queen.

Let us too draw near to her and learn to imitate her docility and openness to God. Let us too, the pilgrims of the third millennium, commend ourselves to her intercession, so that by her prayers she may sustain our faith, nourish our hope and make fruitful our charity:

Holy Mary, Mother of God and our own Mother,
look upon all your children
and come to our aid.

Guide us to Christ, the Way, and the Truth, and the Life;
from the Father implore for us the gifts of the Spirit,
protection from every snare, and freedom from all evil.

Help us ever to bear witness
to the fruitfulness of love and the authentic meaning of life;
teach us to build with you the Kingdom of your Son
the Kingdom of justice, love and peace.

Pray for us and be our
Patronness now and always.

And You who are also Madonna of
the great Croatian Baptismal Vow,
Queen of the Holy Rosary,
today we entrust to You ourselves,
all of this land
and the entire Croatian people.

At the end of Midday Prayer at the "Forum" in the city of Zadar, the Holy Father delivered the following Address as part of the conclusion of his five-day trip to Croatia.

As I am about to leave for Rome, I would like once again to say a grateful goodbye to each and every one of you.

I first thank my Brother *Bishops of Croatia* who have welcomed me and accompanied me to their local Churches, whose vitality and apostolic zeal impressed me: I cherish in my heart those moments of communion.

I thank the *Authorities of the country* and the President of the Republic in particular. I am grateful to them for working so hard to organize my visit. I thank those in charge of security, those who work in the media and all who, in their different more or less visible ways, cooperated to ensure the success of these days.

I am especially grateful to you, *beloved people of Croatia*, for opening your arms and hearts to me on the roads of Dalmatia, Slavonia and Quarnaro. I remember your distress because of the war that still marks your faces and your lives, and I feel close to all who are suffering its tragic consequences. However, I also know your strength, your courage and your hope, and I know that your constant perseverance will enable you to see better days.

I am grateful to you too, Croatian young people. God keep you!

God bless you, Croatia!

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