



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II THE RURAL COMMUNITY OF SAINT PATRICK

Des Moines

Thursday, 4 October 1979

Dear brothers and sisters,

It gives me great pleasure to be here today with you, in the heartland of America, in this lovely Saint Patrick's Church at the Irish Settlement. My pastoral journey through the United States would have seemed incomplete without a visit, although short, to a rural community like this. Let me share with you some thoughts that this particular setting brings to mind, and that are prompted by my meeting with the families who make up this rural parish.

To proclaim Jesus Christ and his Gospel is the fundamental task which the Church has received from her Founder, and which she has taken up ever since the dawn of the first Pentecost. The early Christians were faithful to this mission which the Lord Jesus gave them through his Apostles: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of the bread and the prayers" (*Acts 2 :42*). This is what every community of believers must do: proclaim Christ and his Gospel in fellowship and apostolic faith, in prayer and in the celebration of the Eucharist.

How many Catholic parishes have been started like yours in the early beginnings of the settlement of this region: a small, unpretentious church at the center of a group of family farms, a place and a symbol of prayer and fellowship, the heart of a real Christian community where people know each other personally, share each other's problems, and give witness together to the love of Jesus Christ!

On your farms you are close to God's nature; in your work on the land you follow the rhythm of the

seasons; and in your hearts you feel close to each other as children of a common Father and as brothers and sisters in Christ. How privileged you are, that in such a setting you can worship God together, celebrate your spiritual unity and help to carry each other's burdens. The 1974 Synod of Bishops in Rome and Paul VI in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangeli Nuntiandi* have devoted considerable attention to the small communities where a more human dimension is achieved than is possible in a big city or in a sprawling metropolis. Let your small community be a true place of Christian living and of evangelization, not isolating yourselves from the diocese or from the universal Church, knowing that a community with a human face must also reflect the face of Christ.

Feel grateful to God for the blessings he gives you, not least for the blessing of belonging to this rural parish community. May our heavenly Father bless you, each and every one of you. May the simplicity of your life style and the closeness of your community be the fertile ground for a growing commitment to Jesus Christ, Son of God and Saviour of the world.

I for my part thank the Lord for the opportunity he gave me to come and visit you, and as Vicar of Christ to represent him in your midst. Thank you also for your warm welcome and for offering me your hospitality as I prepare for my encounter with the larger group of people at the Living Farms.

My gratitude goes in a special way to the Bishop of Des Moines for his most cordial invitation. He pointed out many reasons why a visit to Des Moines would be so meaningful: a city that is one of the major agricultural centers of this country; the headquarters also of the dynamic and deserving Catholic Rural Life Conference, whose history is so closely linked to the name of a pastor and a friend of the rural people, Monsignor Luigi Ligutti; a region distinguished by community involvement and family-centered activity, a diocese that is involved, together with all the Catholic Bishops of the heartland, in a major effort to build community.

My greetings and best wishes go also to the whole State of Iowa, to the civil authorities and to all the people, who have so generously extended to me a hospitality marked by kindness.

May God bless you through the intercession of Mary, the Mother of Jesus and the Mother of his Church.

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