



The Holy See

EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION FOR THE CROAT NATIONAL PILGRIMAGE

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

30 April 1979

Dear brothers in the Episcopate,

Dear priests, men and women religious,

Dear sons and daughters of "ever faithful" Croatia!"Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ" (cf. Gal 1:3). "With open arms I press you to me and welcome you with fatherly love" (Letter from Pope John VIII to the Croat people and clergy: Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum collectio*, XVII, 126) here, on St Peter's Tomb, on the occasion of the significant anniversary of the Croats' profession of fidelity to the Holy See, which is at the same time the memory of the fatherly good will towards you of the Successors of St Peter. There are many reasons that justify this common joy of ours, as my brother in the Episcopate, Archbishop Franjo Kuharic, said so well in his address. Truly, in this meeting at St Peter's Tomb, there seems to be concentrated your whole history of over thirteen centuries, and especially the great events of the life of your Church since the time of the Baptism of your people, when it entered the bosom of the Roman Church which is "head and teacher of all Churches" (Letter from Pope John VIII to the Bishop of Nin, Theodosius: Mansi, l.c., XVII, 124). Do you remember "White Croatia", your land of origin, which is just where my native land is? I feel the presence of your beautiful and dear nation, of all your people inside and outside the frontiers of your country, of your old and new fidelities, your anxieties. Here is present the memory of your ancestors, your Christian princes and kings, your bishops and priests, your paleo-Croat liturgical language, your marvellous churches, and especially your Marian sanctuaries. Meanwhile, today we recall especially the relations of Croatia with the Holy See, so clearly expressed in Pope John VIII's letters to Prince Branimiro, to the Croat clergy and people, and to Bishop Theodosius. This happened precisely eleven centuries ago. The events of that time filled with joy the heart of Peter's Successor, and they were decisive for the future history of the Croat people and of the Church, for your faith, culture, and political independence. Having before my eyes the rich and centuries-old past of your people, it seems to me that I can stress the following three extraordinary aspects. First: fidelity to Jesus Christ and to the Gospel; a fidelity to which your ancestors bore witness with the fervour and spirit of martyrs in the struggle throughout the centuries "for the noble Cross and golden freedom". Second: the love and adherence of the Croats to the Roman Church, to St Peter's Chair. This Church was really, your Mother, at whose holy doctrine your ancestors quenched their thirst as at a clear spring" (Letter from

Pope John VIII to the Croat prince Branimiro: *Mansi*, 1.c., XVII, 125). Third: the love, the fidelity and the devotion of the Croats towards Mary, the Mother of God and Mother of the Church, whom you warmly invoke as "Queen of the Croats" and filially honour in your sanctuaries. Today you also confirm this three-fold fidelity of yours as a "Great Vow" of faithfulness to Jesus, to the Church, and to the Mother of God—particularly after the jubilee solemnities at Marija Bistrica, Solin, and Biskupija. Be faithful, be constant, be proud of your Christian name! While I raise my hands today to bless you who are present, the whole of your people and the whole of your land (*ibidem*), I beg the Lord to preserve your faith and I implore the Mother of God to be always and everywhere "your powerful advocate". I extend my blessing to your bishops, priests, men and women religious in order that, faithful to their own vocation, they may be an example to all, and not go astray (Letter from Pope John VIII to the Bishop of Nin, Theodosius: *Mansi*, 1.c. XVII, 124), but may announce the Gospel of Christ as a joyful message of salvation, truth, love and concord. I bless all of you present, your families, young and old, workers and intellectuals, and I beg you: remain faithful to God and to Peter, foster a good family spirit, respect life, bring up a more and more numerous youth and keep the noble tradition of family prayer. I address, above all, you, young faithful: know and love Jesus Christ, man's only Redeemer, and be proud of your Christian name. I bless in a fatherly way also the many workers who have come from other lands. I am acquainted with the worries and difficulties of the workers, therefore I exhort you never to forget your faith, and to love your home, your Church, and your native land. My dear Croats! I thank you for this meeting, for this expression of renewed fidelity. As Pope John VIII once did, today I too delight in your faith, your affection, and your fidelity to Jesus Christ and to his Church. The Pope loves you. The Pope embraces you and welcomes you. The Pope blesses you! Amen © Copyright 1979 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana