



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO IRELAND

HOLY MASS IN LIMERICK

HOMILY OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II

Greenpark Racecourse, Limerick

Monday, 1 October 1979

A phobail dhílis na Mumhan, go mbeannai Dia dhaóibh.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

1. On this last day of my visit to Ireland I come to you to celebrate with you the Holy Eucharist. I wish to seal once more, in the love of Christ Jesus, the bond that links the Successor of Peter in the See of Rome with the Church that is in Ireland. In you I greet once more all the People of Ireland, who have taken their place in the mystery of the Church through the preaching of Saint Patrick and through the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation. I invite you to make this last Mass, which I offer with you and for you, into a special hymn of thanksgiving to the Most Holy Trinity for the days that I have been able to spend in your midst.

I come in the name of Christ to preach to you his own message. The liturgy of the word today speaks of a building, of the cornerstone that supports and gives strength to the house, of the city that is built on the hill for security and protection. These images contain an invitation for all of us, for all Christians, to come close to Christ, the cornerstone, so that he may become our support and the unifying principle which gives meaning and coherence to our lives. It is the same Christ who gives dignity to all the members of the Church and who assigns to each one his mission.

2. Today, I would like to speak to you about that special dignity and mission entrusted to the lay people in the Church. Saint Peter says that Christians are "a royal priesthood, a holy nation" (1 Pt 2 :9). All Christians, incorporated into Christ and his Church by Baptism, are consecrated to God.

They are called to profess the faith which they have received. By the sacrament of Confirmation, they are further endowed by the Holy Spirit with special strength to be witnesses of Christ and sharers in his mission of salvation. Every lay Christian is therefore an extraordinary work of God's grace and is called to the heights of holiness. Sometimes, lay men and women do not seem to appreciate to the full the dignity and the vocation that is theirs as lay people. No, there is no such thing as an "ordinary layman", for all of you have been called to conversion through the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. As God's holy people you are called to fulfil your role in the evangelization of the world.

Yes, the laity are "a chosen race", "a holy priesthood", also called to be "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world". It is their specific vocation and mission to express the Gospel in their lives and thereby to insert the Gospel as a leaven into the reality of the world in which they live and work. The great forces which shape the world—politics, the mass media, science, technology, culture, education, industry and work—are precisely the areas where lay people are especially competent to exercise their mission. If these forces are guided by people who are true disciples of Christ, and who are, at the same time, fully competent in the relevant secular knowledge and skill, then indeed will the world be transformed from within by Christ's redeeming power.

3. Lay people today are called to a strong Christian commitment : to permeate society with the leaven of the Gospel, for Ireland is at a point of decision in her history. The Irish people have to choose today their way forward. Will it be the transformation of all strata of humanity into a new creation, or the way that many nations have gone, giving excessive importance to economic growth and material possessions while neglecting the things of the spirit? The way of substituting a new ethic of temporal enjoyment for the law of God? The way of false freedom which is only slavery to decadence? Will it be the way of subjugating the dignity of the human person to the totalitarian domination of the State? The way of violent struggle between classes? The way of extolling revolution over God?

4. Ireland must choose. You the present generation of Irish people must decide; your choice must be clear and your decision firm. Let the voice of your forefathers, who suffered so much to maintain their faith in Christ and thus to preserve Ireland's soul, resound today in your ears through the voice of the Pope when he repeats the words of Christ: "What will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his life?" (*Mt 16 :26*). What would it profit Ireland to go the easy way of the world and suffer the loss of her own soul?

Your country seems in a sense to be living again the temptations of Christ: Ireland is being asked to prefer the "kingdoms of the world and their splendour" to the Kingdom of God (cf. *Mt 4 :8*). Satan, the Tempter, the Adversary of Christ, will use all his might and all his deceptions to win Ireland for the way of the world. What a victory he would gain, what a blow he would inflict on the Body of Christ in the world, if he could seduce Irish men and women away from Christ. Now is the time of testing for Ireland. This generation is once more a generation of decision.

Dear sons and daughters of Ireland, pray, pray not to be led into temptation. I asked in my first Encyclical for a "great, intense and growing prayer for all the Church". I ask you today for a great, intense and growing prayer for all the people of Ireland, for the Church in Ireland, for all the Church which owes so much to Ireland. Pray that Ireland may not fail in the test. Pray as Jesus taught us to pray : "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil".

Above all, have an immense confidence in the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ and in the power of his death and Resurrection. It is precisely because of the strength of his Paschal Mystery that each of us and all Ireland can say : "I can do all things in him who strengthens me" (*Phil 4 :13*).

Ireland in the past displayed a remarkable interpenetration of her whole culture, speech and way of life by the things of God and the life of grace. Life was in a sense organized around religious events. The task of this generation of Irish men and women is to transform the more complex world of modern industry and urban life by the same Gospel spirit. Today, you must keep the city and the factory for God, as you have always kept the farm and the village community for him in the past. Material progress has in so many places led to decline of faith and growth in Christ, growth in love and in justice.

To accomplish this you must have, as I said in Phoenix Park, consistency between your faith and your daily life. You cannot be a genuine Christian on Sunday, unless you try to be true to Christ's spirit also in your work, your commercial dealings, at your trade union or your employers' or professional meetings. How can you be a true community in Christ at Mass unless you try to think of the welfare of the whole national community when decisions are being taken by your particular sector or group? How can you be ready to meet Christ in judgment unless you remember how the poor are affected by the behaviour of your group or by your personal life style? For Christ will say to us all: "In so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me" (*Mt 25 :40*).

I have learned with great and gratitude of the wonderful spirit of work and cooperation with which you all joined in the material preparations as well as the spiritual preparation for my visit. How much more wonderful still it would be if you could have the same spirit of work and cooperation always "for the glory of God and the honour of Ireland" !

5. Here in Limerick, I am in a largely rural area and many of you are people of the land. I feel at home with you as I did with the rural and mountain people of my native Poland, and I repeat here to you what I told them : Love the land; love the work of the fields for it keeps you close to God, the Creator, in a special way.

To those who have gone to the cities, here or abroad, I say : Keep in contact with your roots in the soil of Ireland, with your families and your culture. Keep true to the faith, to the prayers and the values you learned here; and pass on that heritage to your children, for it is rich and good.

To all I say, revere and protect your family and your family life, for the family is the primary field of Christian action for the Irish laity, the place where your "royal priesthood" is chiefly exercised. The Christian family has been in the past Ireland's greatest spiritual resource. Modern conditions and social changes have created new patterns and new difficulties for family life and for Christian marriage. I want to say to you : do not be discouraged, do not follow the trends where a close-knit family is seen as outdated ; the Christian family is more important for the Church and for society today than ever before.

It is true that the stability and sanctity of marriage are being threatened by new ideas and by the aspirations of some. Divorce, for whatever reason it is introduced, inevitably becomes easier and easier to obtain and it gradually comes to be accepted as a normal part of life. The very possibility of divorce in the sphere of civil law makes stable and permanent marriages more difficult for everyone. May Ireland always continue to give witness before the modern world to her traditional commitment to the sanctity and the indissolubility of the marriage bond. May the Irish always support marriage, through personal commitment and through positive social and legal action.

Above all, hold high the esteem for the wonderful dignity and grace of the Sacrament of marriage. Prepare earnestly for it. Believe in the spiritual power which this Sacrament of Jesus Christ gives to strengthen the marriage union, and to overcome all the crises and problems of life together. Married people must believe in the power of the Sacrament to make them holy ; they must believe in their vocation to witness through their marriage to the power of Christ's love. True love and the grace of God can never let marriage become a self-centred relationship of two individuals, living side by side for their own interests.

6. And here I want to say a very special word to all Irish parents. Marriage must include openness to the gift of children. Generous openness to accept children from God as the gift to their love is the mark of the Christian couple. Respect the God-given cycle of life, for this respect is part of our respect for God himself, who created male and female, who created them in his own image, reflecting his own life-giving love in the patterns of their sexual being.

And so I say to all, have an absolute and holy respect for the sacredness of human life from the first moment of its conception. Abortion, as the Vatican Council stated, is one of the "abominable crimes" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 51). To attack unborn life at any moment from its conception is to undermine the whole moral order which is the true guardian of the well-being of man. The defence of the absolute inviolability of unborn life is part of the defence of human rights and human dignity. May Ireland never weaken in her witness, before Europe and before the whole world, to the dignity and sacredness of all human life, from conception until death.

Dear fathers and mothers of Ireland, believe in your vocation, that beautiful vocation of marriage and parenthood which God has given to you. Believe that God is with you—for all parenthood in heaven and on earth takes its name from him. Do not think that anything you will do in life is more

important than to be a good Christian father or mother. May Irish mothers, young women and girls not listen to those who tell them that working at a secular job, succeeding in a secular profession, is more important than the vocation of giving life and caring for this life as a mother. The future of the Church, the future of humanity depend in great part on parents and on the family life that they build in their homes. The family is the true measure of the greatness of a nation, just as the dignity of man is the true measure of civilization.

7. Your homes should always remain homes of prayer. As I leave today this island which is so dear to my heart, this land and its people which is such a consolation and strength to the Pope, may I express a wish : that every home in Ireland may remain, or may begin again to be, a home of daily family prayer. That you would promise me to do this would be the greatest gift you could give me as I leave your hospitable shores.

I know that your Bishops are preparing a pastoral programme designed to encourage greater sharing by parents in the religious education of their children under the motto "handing on the faith in the home". I am confident that you will all join in this programme with enthusiasm and generosity. To hand on to your children the faith you received from your parents is your first duty and your greatest privilege as parents. The home should be the first school of religion, as it must be the first school of prayer. The great spiritual influence of Ireland in the history of the world was due in great degree to the religion of the homes of Ireland, for here is where evangelization begins, here is where vocations are nurtured. I appeal therefore to Irish parents to continue fostering vocations to the priesthood and the religious life in their homes, among their sons and daughters. It was, for generations, the greatest desire of every Irish parent to have a son a priest or religious, to have a daughter consecrated to God. May it continue to be your desire and your prayer. May increased opportunities for boys and girls never lessen your esteem for the privilege of having a son or daughter of yours selected by Christ and called by him to give up all things and follow him.

I entrust all this to Mary, bright "Sun of the Irish race". May her prayers help all Irish homes to be like the holy house of Nazareth. From them may young Christians go forth, as Jesus did from Nazareth. May they go forth in the power of the Spirit to continue Christ's work and to follow in his footsteps towards the end of the millennium, into the twenty-first century. Mary will keep you all close to him, who is "Father of the world to come" (*Is 9 :6*).

Dia agus Muire libh !

May God and Mary be with you and with the families of Ireland, always !

Slán go deo le brón is buairt. Agus beannacht Dé libh go léir.

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