



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO VENEZUELA,
ECUADOR, PERU, TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION IN PORT OF SPAIN

HOMILY OF POPE JOHN PAUL II

Trinidad and Tobago - Tuesday, 5 February 1985

1. *Glory to you, O Trinity!*

Permit me to begin, dear brothers and sisters, by venerating the Most Holy Trinity, whose name your country bears: Trinidad and Tobago. You are called by the name of God, One and Three, the name of God who is love. And in this most holy name is your glory.

In the name of the Most Holy Trinity - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - I greet you all. I greet you as the Bishop of Rome, the Successor of the Apostle Peter who, by the pilgrimages he has undertaken, visits the communities of the Church in the different parts of the world. Accept this visit and the apostolic ministry that it expresses as a sign of my pastoral love in Christ.

It is a great joy to have this opportunity to celebrate the Eucharist with such a large gathering of the faithful of the Catholic Church in this nation. At the same time, I extend special greetings to the representatives of other Christian communions and to the followers of other religions who are assembled with us today. I assure you of my fraternal respect and esteem for you all.

While praising God for this blessed moment, I also want you to know that I regret that I cannot be with you for a longer period of time. I am especially sorry that there is not enough time to visit the island of Tobago. Yet I am pleased to know that many from Tobago are able to be present at this Eucharistic celebration, and I ask you, when you return to your homes, to take to all your neighbours and friends the cordial greetings and prayerful good wishes of the Pope.

2. In the Gospel which we have just listened to, Jesus says to his disciples: «Let us go elsewhere, to the neighbouring country towns, so that I can preach there too: because that is why I came» (*Marc. 1, 38*).

During the years of his public ministry, Jesus of Nazareth divided his time between prayer and proclaiming the Gospel. Great crowds of people would often surround him, in particular the sick and those tormented by evil spirits. This is what happened on the occasion when Jesus, after healing Simon Peter's mother-in-law, stayed on for a while longer in their home. «The whole town came crowding round the door», Saint Mark tells us, «and he cured many who were suffering from diseases» (*Ibid. 1, 33*). However, after a brief stay he left that place, so that he could go to other places in Galilee with the word of the Gospel and the ministry of salvation. Truly the words then spoken by Simon Peter were prophetic: «Everybody is looking for you» (*Ibid. 1, 37*).

3. Afterwards, the ministry of the Good News was passed on to the Apostles, and they in turn felt the same need to become «all things to all men». In his First Letter to the Corinthians, Saint Paul explains how he must preach the Gospel. With deep conviction he writes: «I should be punished if I did not preach it!» (*1 Cor. 9, 16*). He emphasizes the fact that he «offers the Good News free». And he adds: «I have made myself the slave of everyone so as to win as many as I could . . . For the weak I made myself weak . . . And I still do this, for the sake of the gospel, to have a share in its blessings» (*Ibid. 9, 19. 22-23*).

4. The word of God in today's liturgy directs us to the very beginnings of evangelization, to make it clear that you, too, dear brothers and sisters, are called to be sharers in the Gospel and in its blessings. The very name of your country shows it: Trinidad and Tobago, the country of the Most Holy Trinity!

The early attempts at proclaiming the Gospel here met with serious difficulties and setbacks. The first missionaries to come were two Dominican friars. In 1513, however, they were tragically killed, because they had been mistakenly associated with slave-traders who had been kidnapping native people and selling them into slavery abroad.

More than fifty years passed before the Gospel was preached here again. Among the new missionaries was Saint Louis Bertrand. However, after a relatively brief period, evangelization was once more interrupted. Later on, Franciscans, Jesuits and Capuchins - in addition to the Dominicans - sought, despite numerous hard-ships, to plant the seed of the Gospel in the hearts of your ancestors.

In the first part of the nineteenth century, the valiant efforts of the missionaries made it possible through the grace of God for the first Vicar Apostolic to be appointed. Finally, in 1850, the Archdiocese of Port of Spain was established, and the Vicar Apostolic Patrick Smith was appointed as the first Archbishop. The work of evangelization now moved forward steadily. In

addition to the religious already mentioned, important contributions have also been made by the Augustinians, the Holy Ghost Congregation, Benedictine Monks, Presentation Brothers, De La Salle Brothers, Sisters of Saint Joseph of Cluny, Corpus Christi Carmelite Sisters, Sisters of the Holy Faith, Dominican Sisters and Contemplative Nuns, Sisters of Mercy and Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother.

Mention should also be made of the zealous efforts of Anglican missionaries and other non-Catholic Christians.

5. The abundant fruit of this evangelization is clearly evident today. With 380,000 faithful, the Archdiocese of Port of Spain is the largest of all the dioceses of the Antilles Episcopal Conference. You have catechetical and pastoral centres, a well-equipped radio and television studio, a weekly Catholic newspaper and other important publications. In addition there are numerous thriving lay organizations and a number of community development projects for assisting the youth and the poor. You can boast of an excellent Catholic school system and well-developed catechetical programmes, thanks to the valued contributions of your lay teachers and the zealous evangelical witness of all the religious who serve you with great generosity. Above all, you are a community united in the love of Christ and the unity of his Church. I am especially pleased to know of the way that the laity have taken an increasingly active role in the mission of the Church in this country.

What also brings special joy to my heart is the now increasing number of vocations to the priesthood and religious life. With the Regional Seminary here in Trinidad and Tobago, you provide for the formation of diocesan priests not only for your own country but for other dioceses of the Caribbean as well.

6. As you gratefully acknowledge the fruits of evangelization which are abundantly evident in your nation, there remain some significant problems which you must face as the end of the twentieth century draws near. So many obstacles threaten family life in countries throughout the world, and your society unfortunately is no exception. Families suffer from such evils as conjugal infidelity and divorce, while the very life of the unborn is snuffed out by the unspeakable crime of abortion. Always remember that respect for the sacredness of life is a guarantee of stability for the human community. No society can survive - no nation can last - unless all human life is honoured and protected.

The beguiling attraction of materialism and consumerism has not bypassed you either, with its empty promises of happiness, which instead lead only to disillusionment and a loss of self-respect. Young people especially are vulnerable to the dangerous enticement of drugs, alcohol and pre-marital sex. But, dear young people of Trinidad and Tobago, I urge you to reject the deception of the evil one, and to seek instead to build your future not on such shaky foundations but on the solid rock of authentic moral and religious values, on generous love, on the full truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Saviour of the world. It is he who through his Gospel teaches

us how to live in accordance with the will of our Father in heaven.

As the Church here faces these and other problems, I am heartened to know that you are strengthened in your efforts by a good spirit of ecumenism among Christians, and a true sense of fraternal cooperation with members of other religions. Continue to find strength, too, in your all-night prayer vigils and in the special Year of Prayer, Fasting and Repentance which you have recently begun.

7. «Praise the Lord Jerusalem! Zion, praise your God!» (*Ps.* 147, 12).

These words from the psalm which we have sung in today's liturgy reflect the joy of Jerusalem: the city particularly loved and visited by God. The Church takes up this same song of praise and, like Jerusalem, glorifies God for all his works in the created world, for the whole order of the universe. However, first of all, the Church, following the example of Jerusalem, glorifies God for the word of his revelation:

«He makes his word known to Jacob,
to Israel his laws and decrees.
He has not dealt thus with other nations.
He has not taught them his decrees» (*Ibid.* 19-20).

As I make this pastoral visit today, I wish this thanksgiving of Jerusalem and the Church to be repeated here together with you. Together let us give thanks to God, to the Most Holy Trinity, for the gift of Revelation and for the grace of faith which for many generations has dwelt in your souls.

Let us give thanks to Jesus Christ, because his Apostles have reached here in the person of their successors. Let us thank Mary his Mother because she has become Mother of the inhabitants of Trinidad and Tobago. Let us praise God for Saint Louis Bertrand and for all the zealous missionaries who proclaimed the Good News of salvation in this country. Praise to the Most Holy Trinity for having given the precious gift of faith to each of you and to your forebears! With one heart and one voice let us acclaim: «Praise I the Lord Jerusalem! Zion, praise your God!» (*Ibid.* 12).

8. It is my fervent desire that the Gospel inheritance will always remain in your midst: with its power to lift up the downtrodden and weary, to bring healing and hope, to give meaning to life; with its power to bring about conversion and reconciliation. And I pray that this Gospel of salvation will be extended through catechesis and ever more fully embraced in Christian living. This is my deepest wish for your entire community.

I am grateful to you for your hospitality and your cordial welcome. May this meeting strengthen your unity with the Church in Rome, which remains the centre of universal unity (Cfr. S. IRENAEI

Adversus Haereses, 3, 3, 2).

Once again, in the words of Saint Paul, I assure you that I have come «for the sake of the Gospel» (1 Cor. 9, 23), so that you may all have a share in its blessings!

The love of God the Father, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all! Amen.

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