



# The Holy See

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APOSTOLIC JOURNEY  
TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AND CANADA

**EUCCHARISTIC CONCELEBRATION WITH THE MEMBERS  
OF THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS  
OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

***HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II***

*Dodger Stadium, Los Angeles  
Wednesday, 16 September 1987*

"The Lord has made his salvation known in the sight of the nations" (*Ps. 98 (97), 2*).

Dear brother Bishops,

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

People of this City of our Lady of the Angels, once known as *El Pueblo de Nuestra Señora de los Angeles*,

Citizens of this State of California,

1. Today, from this city of Los Angeles on the Pacific Coast, in which are gathered all the bishops of the United States, we return together to *the Upper Room* in Jerusalem. We hear words from the prayer which Christ pronounced there. Surrounded by his apostles, *Jesus prays for the Church of every time and place*. He says to the Father: "I do not pray for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their word" (*Jo. 17, 20*). Christ, the one Eternal Priest of the new and everlasting covenant, *prays for us*, for all of us gathered here, for everyone who lives here in Los Angeles on the West Coast of the United States of America, for everyone in the world. Yes, *every one of us is included in this priestly prayer of the Redeemer*.

2. Jesus says to the Father: "I pray also for *those who will believe in me through their word*" (*Jo.*

17, 20). This is *the Church* of all ages that he is praying for. How many generations of disciples have already heard these words of Christ! How many bishops priests, men and women religious, and how many parents and teachers in the course of the centuries *have passed on this word of salvation!* In how many places of the world, among how many peoples and nations, has this mystery of the Redemption continued to unfold and bear fruit! It is the word of salvation from which *the Church* has grown and *continues to grow*. This is true for the universal Church and for each local Church. It is true for the Church in Los Angeles which is visited today by the Bishop of Rome, the Successor of Peter.

En 1769 Fray Junípero Serra y los Franciscanos que le acompañaban trajeron la Palabra de Dios a California. Dejando atrás cuanto les era familiar y querido, ellos libremente quisieron venir a este territorio a predicar la Buena Nueva de Nuestro Señor Jesucristo. Su esfuerzo evangelizador inicial mostró muy pronto sorprendentes resultados con la aceptación del Evangelio y el bautismo de miles de nativos americanos. A continuación, toda una serie de misiones fueron establecidas a lo largo de *El Camino Real*, designando a cada una con el nombre de un santo o un misterio de la fe cristiana: San Diego, San Bernardino, San Gabriel, San Buenaventura, Santa Bárbara, San Fernando y muchos más.

Durante los años que siguieron a este inicial esfuerzo misionero, comenzaron a asentarse en California emigrantes, provenientes sobre todo de México y de España; estos primeros colonos, que eran cristianos, trajeron como parte preciosa de su herencia la propia fe católica y apostólica. Ellos no podían imaginar que, en la providencia de Dios, estaban iniciando un estilo peculiar que caracterizaría a California en el futuro.

Subsequently California has become *a haven for immigrants*, a new home for refugees and migrants, a place where people from every continent have come together to fashion a society of the *most varied ethnic diversity*. Many of these, like their earliest predecessors, have brought not only their specific cultural traditions but also the Christian faith. As a result, the Church in California, and particularly the Church in Los Angeles, is *truly catholic in the fullest sense*, embracing peoples and cultures of the widest and richest variety.

Today, in the Church in Los Angeles, Christ is Anglo and Hispanic, Christ is Chinese and Black, Christ is Vietnamese and Irish, Christ is Korean and Italian, Christ is Japanese and Filipino, Christ is Native American, Croatian, Samoan, and many other ethnic groups. In this local Church, the *one Risen Christ*, the one Lord and Saviour, is living in each person who has accepted the word of God and been washed clean in the saving waters of baptism. And *the Church, with all her different members, remains the one Body of Christ*, professing the same faith, united in hope and in love.

3. *What does Jesus pray for in the Upper Room* the night before his Passion and Death? "*That all may be one* as you, Father, are in me, and I in you; I pray that they may be one in us, that the world may believe that you sent me" (Jo. 17, 21). "One in us" - the mystery of the inscrutable divine

Being, the mystery of the intimate life of God: the divine Unity and at the same time *the Trinity*. It is the divine "We" of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And even though it is not attainable in its absolute fullness, this most perfect unity is the real *model for the Church*. According to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, "the Church shines forth as a people made one by the unity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit" (*Lumen Gentium*, 4).

It is for this type of unity for the Church or all times that Christ prays in the Upper Room: "that they may be one, as *we are one - I living in them, you living in me* - that their unity may be complete. So shall the world know that you sent me, and that you loved them as you loved me" (*Jo.* 17, 22-23). This is the unity of the Church's communion which is *born from the communion of Three Persons in the Most Holy Trinity*.

4. People of all times and places are called to this communion. This truth of revelation is first presented to us in today's liturgy, *through the image of the holy city of Jerusalem* found in the reading from the Prophet Isaiah, who writes: "Nations shall walk by your light, and kings by your shining radiance. Raise your eyes and look about; they all gather and come to you: your sons *come from afar*, and your daughters in the arms of their nurses" (*Is.* 60, 3-5). Isaiah spoke these words in Jerusalem as he foresaw *a great light* which would descend upon the city: *this light is Christ*. The awesome movement towards Christ of people from all over the world begins as a result of the Gospel. Animated by the Holy Spirit, in the power of the Cross and Resurrection of Christ, *this movement of people culminates in a new unity* of humanity. Thus, the words of Jesus come to pass: "and I - once I am lifted up from the earth - will draw all men to myself (*Jo.* 12, 32).

The Second Vatican Council gave prominence to this dimension of the unity of the Church, above all *in the teaching on the People of God*. "This People, while remaining one and unique, is to be spread throughout the whole world and must exist in all ages, so that the purpose of God's will may be fulfilled" (*Lumen Gentium*, 13).

5. However, that *People is at the same time the Body of Christ*. The Body is yet another image, and in a certain sense another dimension, of the same truth of the unity that we all constitute in Christ under the action of the Holy Spirit. Accordingly, Saint Paul exhorts us: "Make every effort to preserve *the unity which has the Spirit as its origin* and peace as its binding force. There is but *one body* and *one Spirit*, just as there is but one hope given all of you by your call. There is *one Lord, one faith, one baptism*; one God and Father of all, who is over all, and works through all, and is in all" (*Eph.* 4, 3-6). The unity for which Christ prayed in the Upper Room is realized in this way. It does not come from us, but *from God: from the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit*.

6. *This unity does not at all erase diversity*. On the contrary, *it develops it*. There is constantly "unity in diversity". Through the work of the one Lord, by means of the one faith and the one baptism, this diversity - a diversity of human persons, of individuals - tends towards unity, a unity which is *communion* in the likeness of God the Trinity.

The unity of the Body of Christ gives life; at the same time, it *serves diversity* and develops it. This is the diversity of "everyone" and at the same time of "each one". It is the truth that we find in the Letter to the Ephesians where Paul writes: "*Each of us has received God's favour* in the measure in which Christ bestows it... It is he who gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers in roles of service for the faithful to build up the body of Christ" (*Ibid.* 4, 7. 11-12). As such then it is *the Holy Spirit* who is the source of both the unity and the diversity in the Church: *the unity* because it finds its origin solely in the Spirit; the diversity since the Spirit bestows *the variety of gifts*, the variety of vocations and ministries found in the Church, which is the Body of Christ and at the same time the People of God.

7. The saints whom we honour in today's liturgy, *Cornelius and Cyprian*, remind us of one concrete example of unity in diversity: *the unity of the universal Church* which is served by the Successor of Saint Peter, and the diversity of the particular Churches which help to build up the whole Body through the leadership of the local bishops.

Pope Saint Cornelius was called to shepherd the universal Church in the middle of the third century, a time of religious persecution from without and a time of painful dissension within. His efforts to strengthen the Church's communion were greatly aided by the persuasive talents of the Bishop of Carthage, Saint Cyprian, who while caring for his own flock also promoted unity throughout North Africa. These two men of different backgrounds and temperaments were united *by a mutual love for the Church* and by their *zeal for the unity of the faith*. How appropriate, that we should observe their feast on the day when the present Successor of Peter is meeting the bishops of the United States.

The feast focuses our attention on a basic truth, namely that *the unity of the members of the Church* is deeply affected by *the unity of the bishops* among themselves and by their communion with the Successor of Peter. The Second Vatican Council put it this way: "The Roman Pontiff, as the Successor of Peter, is the perpetual and visible source and foundation of the unity of the bishops and of the multitude of the faithful. The individual bishop, however, is the visible principle and foundation of unity in his particular Church, fashioned after the model of the universal Church. In and from such individual Churches there comes into being the one and only Catholic Church" (*Lumen Gentium*, 23).

8. The Church's concrete *methods of evangelization* and her efforts to promote peace and justice are shaped to a large extent by the fact that the Church is one and yet diverse. The Good News of Jesus must be proclaimed in *the language that particular people understand*, in *artistic symbols* that give meaning to their experience, in ways that correspond as far as possible to their own aspirations and needs, their manner of looking at life and the way in which they speak to God. At the same time, there must be *no betrayal of the essential truth* while the Gospel is being translated and the Church's teaching is being passed down.

The *ethnic universality of the Church* demands a keen sensitivity to authentic cultures and a real sense of what is required by the process of inculturation. In this regard, Pope Paul VI stated very accurately the task to be done: "The question is undoubtedly a delicate one. Evangelization loses much of its force and effectiveness if it does not take into consideration the actual people to whom it is addressed, if it does not use their language, their signs and symbols, if it does not answer the questions they ask, and if it does not have an impact on their concrete life. But on the other hand evangelization risks losing its power and disappearing altogether if one empties or adulterates its content under the pretext of translating it; if, in other words, one sacrifices this reality and destroys the unity without which there is no universality" (Pauli VI *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 63)

Closely aligned with the Church's evangelization is her *action on behalf of peace and justice*, and this too is deeply influenced by her pastoral concern for particular peoples, especially for refugees, immigrants and the poor. For over two hundred years, *the Church has welcomed* the waves of *new immigrants* to the shores of your country. It was the love and compassion of the Church that so many new arrivals first felt when they stepped onto the soil of this young nation. While that continuous pastoral care of the immigrant was focused primarily on the east coast in the early decades, that *pastoral outreach* now extends to virtually every major city in the country. Los Angeles - where this evening we celebrate the diversity of peoples who make up your country - has now become the new major point of entry for the latest waves of immigrants.

I commend you, my brother bishops and all of those working closely with you, for your active collaboration in helping several million undocumented immigrants to become legal residents. This pastoral care of the immigrant in our own day reflects the love of Christ in the Gospels and the legitimate work of the Church in carrying on the challenge of the Lord, "*I was a stranger and you welcomed me*" (*Matth. 25, 35*).

9. The Church faces a particularly difficult task in her efforts to preach the word of God in all *cultures* in which the faithful are constantly challenged by *consumerism and a pleasure-seeking mentality*, where utility, productivity and hedonism are exalted while God and his law are forgotten. In these situations, where ideas and behaviour directly contradict the truth about God and about humanity itself, the Church's witness must be *unpopular*. She must take a *clear* stand on the word of God and proclaim the whole Gospel message with great confidence in the Holy Spirit. In this effort, just as in all others, the Church shows herself to be *the sacrament of salvation* for the whole human race, the people God has chosen to be his channel of peace and reconciliation in a world torn by division and sin.

While the Church's unity is not her own achievement but a precious gift from the Lord, it is nonetheless her serious responsibility to be an instrument for *guarding and restoring unity* in the human family. She does this by being faithful to the truth and by directly opposing the devil, who is "the Father of lies". She does this by efforts to break down prejudice and ignorance as she fosters new understanding and trust. She also promotes unity by being a faithful channel of Christ's mercy

and love.

10. Hoy, *con la ardiente plegaria por la unidad que Cristo pronunció en el Cenáculo*, celebramos la liturgia eucarística justamente aquí, a orillas del Pacífico, en la ciudad que *tomó el nombre de Los Angeles*. Y con el Salmista decimos: "Cantad al Señor un cántico nuevo, porque ha hecho maravillas" (*Ps. 98 (97), 1*).

Sí, Dios ha hecho multitud de maravillas que confirman su acción salvadora en el mundo; la acción de "un solo Dios y Padre de todos, que está sobre todos, por todos y en todos" (*Eph. 4-6*). "El Señor da a conocer su victoria, revela a las naciones su justicia". El, constantemente nos recuerda "su lealtad y fidelidad" (*Ps. 98 (97), 2-3*). *Este es el camino que Dios es para nosotros; el Dios de nuestra fe*, el Padre de Nuestro Señor Jesucristo.

The angels in heaven see "the face of God" in the beatific vision of glory. All of us, people of this planet, *walk in faith* towards that same vision. And we walk *in hope*. We draw the strength of this hope from the same prayer of Christ in the Upper Room. Did not Christ say in the words addressed to the Father: "I have given them the glory you gave me that they may be one, as we are one - I living in them, you living in me"? (*Jo. 17, 22-23*)

"*The glory... I gave to them*". We are called in Christ *to share in the glory* that is part of the beatific vision of God.

Truly, "all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation by our God". For this reason: "Sing to the Lord a new song!" (*Ps. 98 (97), 3. 1*). Amen.

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