



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT TO THE PARISH OF STS CYRIL AND METHODIUS IN ROME

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Sunday, 15 February 1998

1. “Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation” (Mk 16:15). Before ascending to the Father, Jesus entrusts his Apostles with the mandate to continue his mission on earth by announcing his salvation to the whole world. This task, which characterizes the Church, the People of God on their way towards the heavenly homeland, is expressed in the plurality of ministries and charisms with which Christ enriches it. Pastors and confessors of the faith, virgins and martyrs, priests and laity, holy men and women of every age offer effective help in spreading the Gospel to every corner of the globe.

Sts Cyril and Methodius completed this work. Natives of Thessalonica and fearless witnesses to the Gospel, we could say that they were the first in a long line of apostles who worked actively in the service of Christ among the Slavic peoples. Your parish is honoured in having as its special protectors these two great co-patron saints of Europe. Their example is also very significant for us. In fact, as I emphasized in the Encyclical *Slavorum Apostoli*, “it can be said that their memory is particularly vivid and relevant to our day” (n. 1).

Although they had the opportunity to pursue brilliant political careers, these two brothers dedicated themselves completely to the Lord. At the request of Prince Rastislav of Greater Moravia to Emperor Michael III, they were sent to proclaim the Christian faith to the people of Central Europe in their own language. They thus devoted their lives to this work, facing many difficulties and sufferings, persecutions and imprisonment, and both becoming shining examples of devotion to the cause of Christ and of love towards their brethren who were thirsting for the Gospel truth.

2. The words of St Paul that we heard a few moments ago certainly apply to them: “Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!” (1 Cor 9:16). In opening his soul to the Christians of Corinth, the Apostle expresses his awareness of the need and urgency of the Gospel message. He considers it a great gift but also an inescapable duty: a real “obligation” (cf. *ibid.*), for which he is responsible together with the other Apostles. By making himself “all things to all men, that I might by

all means save some" (ibid., n. 22), he shows us how every evangelizer must learn to adapt himself to the language of his listeners, in order to be deeply attuned to them.

This is what the two saints whom we remember today did most admirably: their entire mission was aimed at "incarnating" the Word of God in the Slavic language and culture. It is to them that we owe the transcription of the sacred and liturgical texts into the Old Slavonic language with a new alphabet. In order to maintain strong ecclesial communion, they came to Rome and received the approval of Pope Hadrian II. It was in Rome that Cyril died on 14 February 869, while Methodius, having been consecrated a Bishop for the territory of the ancient Diocese of Pannonia and appointed Papal Legate for the Slavic nations, continued the missionary task which he had begun with his brother.

We give thanks to God for these two saints, Cyril and Methodius, who were wise messengers of the Gospel in Europe. Even today they continue to teach the evangelizers of our time the courage to preach and the necessary attitude for inculturating the faith.

3. Dear brothers and sisters of Sts Cyril and Methodius Parish, I am pleased to be here among you today to celebrate the patronal feast of your community. I cordially greet the Cardinal Vicar, the Auxiliary Bishop Clemente Riva, your parish priest, Fr Giuseppe Trappolini, and his closest co-workers in the pastoral care of the parish. My affectionate greeting is extended to all of you who are taking part in this Eucharist, with a special thought for those — the sick, the elderly or those otherwise unable to leave their homes to come to church — who, through television, have joined in our festive celebration.

Yours is a young community which, in a relatively short time, received the gift of this new church. About three years ago in St Peter's Square, I myself had the joy of blessing the cornerstone of your church which, as part of the project "50 Churches for Rome 2000", was built swiftly and dedicated on 8 November last by the Cardinal Vicar. For the area of Acilia known as Dragoncello, this parish complex is the only centre of religious and social gathering open to the many young families who live in the district.

While I give thanks to God together with you for what you have been able to achieve up to now, I would like, by my visit today, to urge you to continue growing in generous apostolic service, concerned above all for the Christian formation of your children and young people. During the first five years of this community about 400 infants received Baptism. This means that in the near future this parish will see the presence of many children and young people.

Dear brothers and sisters, it is up to you to prepare the soil for the calm and healthy growth of these children. And you can fulfil this mission if you allow yourselves to be guided by the Word of God and if you always take care to offer a consistent testimony of faith and love.

4. The *City Mission* that is being celebrated in this parish, as in the other parishes of Rome, offers you an opportunity for spiritual and apostolic renewal. Do not become complacent, dear friends, within the walls of the church and the parish facilities, even if they are new and beautiful, but reach out to the people who do not attend. Everyone is waiting for a fresh proclamation of Jesus Christ, the only One who can save man. There are many who have moved to this neighbourhood from other parts of the city. These are often young couples who have come to live here after their

wedding. See that the change of surroundings does not disorient them, causing them to stray dangerously from ecclesial and sacramental life. Rather, be a community that is able to welcome them and encourage their harmonious involvement.

To this end, be willing to meet the families, offering them friendship, sharing with them the joy of faith. The City Mission will be very useful for this purpose with its meetings in the various centres. This task of solidarity and welcome in the service of the Gospel must become part of daily life, so that common prayer, reflection on the Gospel and mutual support will never cease.

But all this interesting and urgent apostolic activity cannot be effective unless it is sustained by moments of prayer, especially of long periods before the Eucharist. I know that in this parish, due to the presence of the Missionaries of Charity, daily Eucharistic adoration is guaranteed. How beautiful it would be if Eucharistic adoration could be increased in every parish in preparation for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, which will be an intensely Eucharistic year, since the city will host the International Eucharistic Congress on the theme: *“Jesus Christ, the world’s only Saviour, Bread for a new life”*.

5. *“All the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God”* (Is 52:10). As we heard in the first reading, the prophet Isaiah foretells the universality of salvation, offered to all peoples without distinction of race, language and culture. Every believer is called, according to his own capabilities and responsibilities, to participate in the great mission of evangelization. This task must also be pursued with perseverance and faithfulness in your parish, so that the Gospel may enter every home, family and the various contexts of daily life.

May the Spirit of the Lord enlighten you and support you in this important apostolic task. Dear brothers and sisters, let us pray together that the values of the Gospel, in particular those regarding life and the family based on marriage, will be defended and shared. Let us pray for young people, that they may find in the love of the Lord the strength to resist the temptations and dangers that threaten them. Let us pray that all men of goodwill will commit themselves to building a society that is more in harmony with the Gospel message. I entrust this community to the heavenly protection of Mary and the Holy Brothers of Thessalonica. I likewise entrust to them the path of the Slavic peoples and the future of all Europe. Sts Cyril and Methodius, apostles of the Slavic peoples and co-patrons of Europe, pray for us!

Amen.

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