



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II TO A GROUP OF AFRICAN AMERICANS

*Harlem, New York
Tuesday, 2 October 1979*

Dear friends,

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

"This is the day the Lord has made ; let us be glad and rejoice in it" (*Ps 118: 24*).

I greet you in the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ. I welcome this opportunity to be with you and to speak to you, and through you to extend my greetings to all black Americans.

At Cardinal Cooke's suggestion, I was happy to include in my plans a visit to the Parish of Saint Charles Borromeo in Harlem, and to its black community, which for half a century has nurtured here the cultural, social and religious roots of black people. I have greatly looked forward to being here this evening.

I come to you as a servant of Jesus Christ, and I want to speak to you about him. Christ came to bring joy: joy to children, joy to parents, joy to families and to friends, joy to workers and to scholars, joy to the sick and to the elderly, joy to all humanity. In a true sense, joy is the keynote of the Christian message and the recurring motif of the Gospels. Recall the first words of the angel to Mary : "Rejoice, O full of grace, the Lord is with you" (*Lk 1: 28*). And at the birth of Jesus, the angels announced to the shepherds: "Listen, I bring you news of great joy, joy to be shared by all people" (*Lk 2: 10*). Years later as Jesus entered Jerusalem riding on a colt, "the whole group of disciples joyfully began to praise God at the top of their voices. 'Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord' !" (*Lk 19: 37-38*) . We are told that some Pharisees in the crowd complained,

saying : "Master, stop your disciples". But Jesus answered: " I tell you, if they were silent, the very stones would cry out" (*Lk 19 :39-40*).

Are not those words of Jesus still true today? If we are silent about the joy that comes from knowing Jesus, the very stones of our cities will cry out ! For we are an Easter people and "Alleluia" is our song. With Saint Paul I exhort you: "Rejoice in the Lord always, I say it again, rejoice" (*Phil 4: 4*).

Rejoice because Jesus has come into the world!
 Rejoice because Jesus has died upon the Cross!
 Rejoice because he rose again from the dead !
 Rejoice because in baptism, he washed away our sins !
 Rejoice because Jesus has come to set us free !
 And rejoice because he is the master of our life!

But how many people have never known this joy? They feed on emptiness and tread the paths of despair. "They walk in darkness and the shadow of death" (*Lk 1 :79*). And we need not look to the far ends of the earth for them. They live in our neighborhoods, they walk down our streets, they may even be members of our own families. They live without true joy because they live without hope. They live without hope because they have never heard, really heard the Good News of Jesus Christ, because they have never met a brother or a sister who touched their lives with the love of Jesus and lifted them up from their misery.

We must go to them therefore as messengers of hope. We must bring to them the witness of true joy. We must pledge to them our commitment to work for a just society and city where they feel respected and loved.

And so I encourage you, be men and women of deep and abiding faith. Be heralds of hope. Be messengers of joy. Be true workers for justice. Let the Good News of Christ radiate from your hearts, and the peace he alone gives remain forever in your souls.

My dear brothers and sisters in the black community : "Rejoice". Alleluia!

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