



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT IN AUSTRALIA

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
DURING THE ECUMENICAL CELEBRATION
AT «CRICKET GROUND»**

Melbourne (Australia), 27 November 1986

*Dear Friends in Christ,*1. "Peace to all of you who are in Christ". It is a joy for me to be with you, my brothers and sisters of the Catholic Church and of other Churches and Ecclesial Communities to pray together and to reflect on God's gifts of unity and peace. I thank all of you who have come here today in order to praise God for the growth of the ecumenical movement which has taken place among Christians in Australia. This is also an occasion for praying fervently that the divisions still existing among Christians may be overcome, so that we may be more effective witnesses to the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.2. As Christians, we are convinced of the transcendent nature of peace and reconciliation, of the fact that they are God's design and gift. The reign of God was begun in the person of Jesus Christ, who "is our peace... and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility". Through his Death and Resurrection, he has brought about reconciliation between heaven and earth, thus overcoming the disorder of humanity caused by sin, and restoring the image of God in man. This is why Saint Paul can state with such conviction: "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all".3. The Church is called to be the instrument of salvation in the world, the effective sign and means of unity and reconciliation. She bears within herself that reconciling force which is a sharing in the life of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This is the source of her unity, the power which enables her to promote peace and reconciliation in the world. The Church is that part of the human family which, in baptism, agrees to live in a new way, being rescued from division and sin. She is the multitude gathered and unified in and through the Oneness of God. Her members, while preserving their legitimate variety, are brought into one communion in the Blessed Trinity. Thus, Saint Paul exhorts the many different peoples who are members of the Church to bear with one another in love, "eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace". He links mutual forbearance with love, the hope of unity with peace. This is the pattern of the Church's commitment for the salvation of the world, for its peace and reconciliation. The Church's own unity is hope for the world.4. That is why our gathering here today is a sign of renewed hope for the whole world. Our will to overcome the divisions which still keep Christians apart is demanded by the will of Christ for the peace of the human family and the salvation of all. In Jesus Christ unity, reconciliation and peace are made possible; in fact, not only are they possible, they are also our task. It is essential that those who follow Christ should live united in faith and

love, and treat one another as brothers and sisters. For this reason, the first and fundamental step along the path of ecumenism is personal conversion of mind and heart. As the Second Vatican Council said: "There can be no ecumenism worthy of the name without a change of heart. For it is from newness of attitudes, from self-denial and unstinted love, that yearnings for unity take their rise and grow towards maturity".⁵ Dear brothers and sisters: I would like to encourage all of you to face the ecumenical task in all its fullness, to be strong in faith and hope, to pray and work untiringly for that unity which is God's will and his gift. A federation of common effort, however laudable, still falls short of that living and organic communion of believers which is God's design and will. Our goal is a complete unity in faith and charity. Such complete unity is necessary so that Christians may bear a full common witness to Christ through their mission and service in the world. Living and organic communion means unity in sacramental life. The inner being of the Church is a sharing in the life of the Triune God. This sharing is expressed and increased in sacramental acts. Working through these acts and in the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ touches human minds and hearts and helps us truly to live in "one body and one Spirit". It is likewise a unity in the visible structure of the Church, which is the inevitable expression of her inner communion and which includes the continuing ministry of the Apostles, under the leadership of Peter, at the service of unity.⁶ The world desperately needs the full communion of one Church, herself a sign and bearer of the Triune God's work of uniting the human family. And despite the serious issues which still divide us, our present degree of unity in Christ is already a sign that Jesus Christ is present among us, that it is he who is the source of our reconciliation. Our common prayer expresses and manifests the peace reigning in our hearts, that gift "from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation". Hence the importance of the new attitude of dialogue in which we are able to come together. The many ecumenical initiatives going on here in Australia and in other parts of the world, such as theological discussion, common prayer, collaboration in many fields – all speak of the Christian vision of reconciliation, which we must both proclaim to the world and show by the way we live. They speak of our desire to surrender ourselves to the Holy Spirit.⁷ And now I would like to address a word particularly to the bishops of the Catholic Church in Australia and to the leaders of the other Churches and Christian Communities here. After the Day of Prayer for Peace in Assisi on 27 October, in an exchange of views among Christian leaders, the Christian World Communions and the World Council of Churches told the Holy See how important they felt it was that something of the impetus and spirit of the Assisi gathering should be brought to Christians at the local level. They spoke of the value local level. They spoke of the value of prayer as a primary means of securing peace and of securing the renewal of individuals and society which peace demands. They affirmed the importance of Christians acting together in local and regional peace initiatives, where this is possible and appropriate. This can be a witness to the hope given by Christ, at a time like the present when people are faced with world tension. The event in Assisi was linked to a worldwide movement of prayer for peace among Christians, prayer which is also intended to help people discern appropriate means of working for peace. I encourage you to promote this prayer for peace here in Australia. It will be a response to a great challenge of our age; it will be another step in that joint effort of Christians to be at the service of humanity, to be a sign of hope.⁸ Above all I urge you to make spiritual ecumenism the centre of all your ecumenical initiatives. For, as the Second Vatican Council stated, "The more purely Christ's faithful strive to live according to the Gospel, the more they are fostering and even practising Christian unity. For they can achieve depth and ease in strengthening mutual brotherhood to the degree that they enjoy profound communion with the Father, the Word, and the Spirit. This change of heart and holiness of life, along with public and private prayer for the unity of Christians, should be regarded as the soul of the whole ecumenical movement, and can rightly be called spiritual ecumenism". I wish to thank all of you who have come here today to pray with me, to listen to God's word and reflect on its meaning for our times. As you seek to walk together in the ways of reconciliation and unity, I pray that you may "agree with one another, live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you". © Copyright

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