



APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO IRELAND

HOLY MASS IN PHOENIX PARK

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

*Dublin
Saturday, 29 September 1979*

A phobail dhilis na hÉireann, go mbeannaí Dia dhaoibh!

*Your Excellency, the President of Ireland,
Your Eminence, the Cardinal Primate,
Your Grace, the Archbishop of Dublin,
My Brothers in the Episcopate: Bishops of Ireland, Visiting Bishops,
Your Excellency, the Taoiseach, and Members of the Irish Government,
My Lord Mayor and Corporation of Dublin,*

Dear brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ,

1. Like Saint Patrick, I too have heard "the voice of the Irish" calling to me, and so I have come to you, to all of you in Ireland.

From the very beginning of its faith, Ireland has been linked with the Apostolic See of Rome. The early records attest that your first Bishop, Palladius, was sent to Ireland by Pope Celestine; and that Saint Patrick, who succeeded Palladius, was "confirmed in the faith" by Pope Leo the Great. Among the sayings attributed to Patrick is the famous one addressed to the "Church of the Irish, nay of the Romans", showing them how they must pray in order to be "Christians as the Romans are".

This union of charity between Ireland and the Holy Roman Church has remained inviolable and unbreakable down all the centuries. You Irish Catholics have kept and loved the unity and peace of the Catholic Church, treasuring it above all earthly treasures. Your people have spread this love for the Catholic Church everywhere they went, in every century of your history. This has been done by the earliest monks and the missionaries of Europe's Dark Ages, by the refugees from persecution, by the exiles and by the missionaries—men and women—of the last century and this one.

I have come to you as Bishop of Rome and Pastor of the whole Church, in order to celebrate this union with you in the Sacrifice of the Eucharist, here in Ireland's capital city of Dublin, for the first time in Irish history. As I stand at this moment, a pilgrim for Christ to the land from which so many pilgrims for Christ, *peregrini pro Christo*, went out over Europe, the Americas, Australia, Africa, Asia, I am living a moment of intense emotion. As I stand here, in the company of so many hundreds of thousands of Irish men and women, I am thinking of how many times, across how many centuries, the Eucharist has been celebrated in this land. How many and how varied the places where Mass has been offered—in stately mediaeval and in splendid modern cathedrals; in early monastic and in modern churches; at Mass rocks in the glens and forests by "hunted priests", and in poor thatch-covered chapels, for a people poor in worldly goods but rich in the things of the spirit, in "wake-houses" or "station houses", or at great open-air hostings of faithful—on the top of Croagh Patrick and at Lough Derg. Small matter where the Mass was offered; for the Irish, it was always the Mass that mattered. How many have found in it the spiritual strength to live, even through the times of greatest hardship and poverty, through days of persecution and vexations. Dear brothers and sisters, dear sons and daughters of Ireland, permit me, together with you, to glance back over your history, in the light of the Eucharist celebrated here for so many centuries.

2. From the Upper Room in Jerusalem, from the Last Supper, in a certain sense, *the Eucharist writes the history of human hearts and of human communities*. Let us reflect on all those who, being nourished on the Body and Blood of the Lord, have lived and died on this island, *bearing in themselves, because of the Eucharist, the pledge of eternal life*. Let us think of so many generations of sons and daughters of this country, and, at the same time, sons and daughters of the Church. May this Eucharist of ours be celebrated in the atmosphere of the great communion of the Saints. We form a spiritual union in this Mass with all the generations who have done God's will throughout the ages up to the present day. We are one in faith and spirit with the vast throng which filled this Phoenix Park on the occasion of the last great Eucharistic hosting held on this spot, at the Eucharistic Congress in 1932.

Faith in Christ has profoundly penetrated into the consciousness and life of your ancestors. *The Eucharist transformed their souls for eternal life*, in union with the living God. May this exceptional Eucharistic encounter of today be at the same time a prayer for the dead, for your ancestors and forebears. With their help, may it become more fruitfully a prayer for the living, for the present generation of sons and daughters of today's Ireland, preparing for the end of the twentieth century, so that they can meet the challenges that will be put before them.

3. Yes, Ireland, that has overcome so many difficult moments in her history, is being challenged in a new way today, for she is not immune from the influence of ideologies and trends which present-day civilization and progress carry with them. The very capability of mass media to bring the whole world into your homes produces a new kind of confrontation with values and trends that up until now have been alien to Irish society. Pervading materialism imposes its dominion on man today in many different forms and with an aggressiveness that spares no one. The most sacred principles, which were the sure guides for the behaviour of individuals and society, are being hollowed out by false pretences concerning freedom, the sacredness of life, the indissolubility of marriage, the true sense of human sexuality, the right attitude towards the material goods that progress has to offer. Many people now are tempted to self-indulgence and consumerism, and human identity is often defined by what one owns. Prosperity and affluence, even when they are only beginning to be available to larger strata of society, tend to make people assume that they have a right to all that prosperity can bring, and thus they can become more selfish in their demands. Everybody wants a full freedom in all the areas of human behaviour and new models of morality are being proposed in the name of would-be freedom. When the moral fibre of a nation is weakened, when the sense of personal responsibility is diminished, then the door is open for the justification of injustices, for violence in all its forms, and for the manipulation of the many by the few. The challenge that is already with us is the temptation to accept as true freedom what in reality is only a new form of slavery.

4. And so, it becomes all the more urgent to steep ourselves in the truth that comes from Christ, who is "the way, the truth and the life" (*Jn 14 :6*), and in the strength that he himself offers us through his Spirit. It is especially in the Eucharist that the power and the love of the Lord are given to us.

The Sacrifice of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ offered up for us is an act of supreme love on the part of the Saviour. It is his great victory over sin and death—a victory that he communicates to us. The Eucharist is a promise of eternal life, since Jesus himself tells us : "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day" (*Jn 6 :54*).

The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is meant to be the festive celebration of our salvation. In the Mass we give thanks and praise to God our Father for having given us Redemption through the precious blood of Jesus Christ. The Eucharist is also the centre of the Church's unity, as well as her greatest treasure. In the words of the Second Vatican Council, the Eucharist contains "the Church's entire spiritual wealth" (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 5).

Today I wish to express the gratitude of Jesus Christ and his Church for the devotion that Ireland has shown to the Holy Eucharist. As Successor of Peter and Vicar of Christ, I assure you that the Mass is indeed the source and summit of your Christian life.

On Sunday mornings in Ireland, no one seeing the great crowds making their way to and from Mass could have any doubt about Ireland's devotion to the Mass. For them a whole Catholic people is seen to be faithful to the Lord's command : Do this in memory of me. May the Irish Sunday continue always to be the

day when the whole people of God—the *pobal Dé*—makes its way to the House of God, which the Irish call the House of the People—the *teach an phobail*—. I have learned with great joy that large numbers also come to Mass several times each week and even every day. This practice is a great source of grace and of growth in holiness.

5. Yes, it is from the Eucharist that all of us receive the grace and strength for daily living to live real Christian lives, in the joy of knowing that God loves us, that Christ died for us, and that the Holy Spirit lives in us.

Our full participation in the Eucharist is the real source of the Christian spirit that we wish to see in our personal lives and in all aspects of society. Whether we serve in politics, in the economic, cultural, social or scientific fields—no matter what our occupation is—the Eucharist is a challenge to our daily lives.

Dear brothers and sisters: there must always be consistency between what we believe and what we do. We cannot live on the glories of our past Christian history. Our union with Christ in the Eucharist must be expressed in the truth of our lives today—in our actions, in our behaviour, in our life-style, and in our relationships with others. For each one of us the Eucharist is a call to ever greater effort, so that we may live as true followers of Jesus : truthful in our speech, generous in our deeds, concerned, respectful of the dignity and rights of all persons, whatever their rank or income, self-sacrificing, fair and just, kind, considerate, compassionate and self-controlled—looking to the well-being of our families, our young people, our country, Europe and the world. The truth of our union with Jesus Christ in the Eucharist is tested by whether or not we really love our fellow men and women; it is tested by how we treat others, especially our families : husbands and wives, children and parents, brothers and sisters. It is tested by whether or not we try to be reconciled with our enemies, by whether or not we forgive those who hurt us or offend us. It is tested by whether we practise in life what our faith teaches us. We must always remember what Jesus said: "You are my friends if you do what I command you" (*Jn 15 :14*).

6. The Eucharist is also a great *call to conversion*. We know that it is an invitation to the Banquet ; that, by nourishing ourselves on the Eucharist, we receive in it the Body and Blood of Christ, under the appearances of bread and wine. Precisely because of this invitation, the Eucharist is and remains the call to conversion. If we receive it as such a call, such an invitation, it brings forth in us its proper fruits. It transforms our lives. It makes us a "new man", a "new creature" (cf. *Gal 6:15; Eph 2:15; 2 Cor 5 :17*). It helps us not to be overcome by evil, but to "*overcome evil with good*" (*Rom 12 :21*). The Eucharist helps love to triumph in us—love over hatred, zeal over indifference.

The call to conversion in the Eucharist links the Eucharist with that other great Sacrament of God's love, which is Penance. Every time that we receive the Sacrament of Penance or Reconciliation, we receive the forgiveness of Christ, and we know that this forgiveness comes to us through the merits of his death—the very death that we celebrate in the Eucharist. In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we are all invited to meet Christ personally in this way, and to do so frequently. This encounter with Jesus is so very important that I wrote in my first Encyclical Letter these words: "In faithfully observing the centuries-old practice of the Sacrament of Penance—the practice of individual confession with a personal act of sorrow and the intention to amend and make satisfaction—the Church is therefore defending the human soul's individual right : man's right to a more personal encounter with the crucified forgiving Christ, with Christ saying, through the minister of the sacrament of Reconciliation : 'Your sins are forgiven' ; 'Go, and do not sin again'". Because of Christ's love and mercy, there is no sin that is too great to be forgiven ; there is no sinner who will be rejected. Every person who repents will be received by Jesus Christ with forgiveness and immense love.

It was with great joy that I received the news that the Irish Bishops had asked all the faithful to go to Confession as part of a great spiritual preparation for my visit to Ireland. You could not have given me a greater joy or a greater gift. And if today there is someone who is still hesitating, for one reason or another, please remember this : the person who knows how to acknowledge the truth of guilt, and asks Christ for forgiveness, enhances his own human dignity and manifests spiritual greatness.

I take this occasion to ask all of you to continue to hold this Sacrament of Penance in special honour, for ever. Let all of us remember the words of Pius XII in regard to frequent Confession : " Not without the inspiration of the Holy Spirit was this practice introduced into the Church " (*AAS* 35, 1943, p. 235).

Dear brothers and sisters: the call to conversion and repentance comes from Christ, and always leads us back to Christ in the Eucharist.

7. I wish also at this time to recall to you an important truth affirmed by the Second Vatican Council, namely: "The spiritual life, nevertheless, is not confined to participation in the liturgy" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 12). And so I also encourage you in the other exercises of devotion that you have lovingly preserved for centuries, especially those in regard to the Blessed Sacrament. These acts of piety honour God and are useful for our Christian lives ; they give joy to our hearts, and help us to appreciate more the liturgical worship of the Church.

The visit to the Blessed Sacrament—so much a part of Ireland, so much a part of your piety, so much a part of your pilgrimage to Knock—is a great treasure of the Catholic faith. It nourishes social love and gives us opportunities for adoration and thanksgiving, for reparation and supplication. Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, Exposition and Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, Holy Hours and Eucharistic processions are likewise precious elements of your heritage—in full accord with the teaching of the Second Vatican Council.

At this time, it is also my joy to reaffirm before Ireland and the whole world the wonderful teaching of the Catholic Church regarding Christ's consoling presence in the Blessed Sacrament : his real presence in the fullest sense : the substantial presence by which the whole and complete Christ, God and man, is present (cf. *Mysterium Fidei*, 39). The Eucharist, in the Mass and outside of the Mass, is the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, and is therefore deserving of the worship that is given to the living God, and to him alone (cf. *Mysterium Fidei*, 55; Paolo VI, Address of 15 June 1978).

And so, dear brothers and sisters, every act of reverence, every genuflection that you make before the Blessed Sacrament, is important because it is an act of faith in Christ, an act of love for Christ. And every sign of the Cross and gesture of respect made each time you pass a church is also an act of faith.

May God preserve you in this faith this holy Catholic faith—this faith in the Blessed Sacrament.

I end, dear brothers and sisters, beloved sons and daughters of Ireland, by recalling how Divine Providence has used this Island on the edge of Europe *for the conversion of the European continent*, that continent which has been for two thousand years *the continent of the first evangelization*. I myself am a son of that nation which received the Gospel more than a thousand years ago, many centuries later than your homeland. When in 1966, we solemnly recalled the millennium of the Baptism of Poland, we recalled with gratitude also those Irish missionaries who, among others, participated in the work of the first evangelization of the country that extends East and West from the Vistula.

One of my closest friends, a famous Professor of History in Cracow, having learned of my intention to visit Ireland, said : "What a blessing that the Pope goes to Ireland. This country deserves it in a special way". I too have always thought like this. Thus I thought that the centenary of the Sanctuary of the Mother of God at Knock constitutes, this year, a providential occasion for the Pope's visit to Ireland. So, by this visit, I am expressing my sense of what Ireland "deserves", and also satisfying deep needs of my own heart. I am paying a great debt to Jesus Christ, who is the Lord of history and the author of our salvation.

Hence I express my joy that I can be with you today, 29 September 1979, Feast of Saint Michael, Saint Gabriel and Saint Raphael, Archangels, and that I can celebrate the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and give witness before you to Christ and to his Paschal Mystery. Thus I can proclaim the vivifying reality of conversion through the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Penance, in the midst of the present generation of the sons and daughters of Ireland. *Metanoieite*, "Be converted" ! (*Mk* 1 :15). Be converted continually. Be converted every day; because constantly, every day, the Kingdom of God draws closer. On the road of this temporal world, let Christ be the Lord of your souls, for eternal life. Amen.

