



The Holy See

PROMULGATION OF THE POST-SYNODAL APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION "ECCLESIA IN OCEANIA"

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER

Thursday, 22 November 2001

"Let the heavens rejoice and earth be glad, let the sea and all within it thunder praise" (Ps 96:11).

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

1. From the far corners of the world you have come, witnesses to the glorious life which is ours in Christ Jesus, and in particular witnesses to *the faith and love of God's People in Oceania*. With gratitude for the successful celebration of the *Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Oceania* we join in the great hymn of praise which rises ceaselessly from the heart of the Church to the Most Holy Trinity.

I would have wished to visit Oceania once again, in order to present the fruits of the Synod's work, the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Oceania*. But it was not to be! Therefore the Pacific comes to the Bishop of Rome, and "with the affection of Christ Jesus" (*Phil 1:8*) I greet you and all whom you represent. In you I see the boundless ocean glimmering in the sun; the Southern Cross shining in the night sky; the islands great and small; the cities and the villages; the beaches and the forests. But most of all I see in you the peoples who are the true wealth of Oceania: the Melanesian, Polynesian and Micronesian peoples in their wonderful array; the Aborigines of Australia; the Maoris of New Zealand; the many immigrant peoples who have made Oceania their home. In the mighty symphony of Oceania we hear as it were "the Lord's voice resounding on the waters, the Lord on the immensity of waters, the voice of the Lord full of power, the voice of the Lord full of splendour" (*Ps 29:3-4*).

2. The Special Assembly was an experience of intense communion, and one of its many graces

was that all the Bishops could take part. The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council – and I was one – were marked for ever by the experience of communion in that event which was without doubt the great grace bestowed on the Church in the twentieth century (cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 57). In the Special Assembly for Oceania, a new generation of Bishops who had not been at the Council could taste something of its extraordinary atmosphere and effect, and thus be better equipped to implement its teaching, as the whole Church must do more boldly than ever as we move into the new millennium. Far from having exhausted its potential, the Second Vatican Council remains the guiding light of the Church's pilgrimage.

Like the Great Jubilee for which it prepared, the Special Assembly was both "a remembrance of the past [and] a prophecy of the future" (*ibid.*, 3). Together we looked back upon the story of evangelization in Oceania, and gave thanks to the Father of all mercies for the magnificent work of the early missionaries, and for the welcome which the peoples of Oceania gave to the Lord Jesus himself, "*walking his way, telling his truth and living his life*". We heard the story of the remarkable development of the Church in your lands, acknowledging with deep gratitude that it is "God alone who gives the growth" (1 Cor 3:7). The Synod rejoiced at the countless signs of holiness and justice present among the peoples of Oceania, a pledge of the springtime of faith for which we yearn and work.

But we recognized too that the many challenges facing the peoples of Oceania at this time are summoning the Church to engage the Pacific peoples and their cultures with renewed vigour and conviction. The Synod heard of economic crises, political instability, corruption, ethnic conflicts, the erosion of traditional forms of social organization, the breakdown of law and order, the threat of global warming and, especially in the wealthier societies, of a genuinely spiritual crisis of meaning which shows itself most clearly in the erosion of respect for human life. Yet the Bishops were in no way daunted by all of this. On the contrary, it became clearer as the Special Assembly went on that the Holy Spirit is calling the Church in Oceania to embark upon *the great task of a new evangelization*. In that sense the Synod became "a prophecy of the future", and the Bishops felt ever more deeply that they are "servants of the Gospel of Jesus Christ *for the hope of the world*", that hope of which the recent Tenth Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops spoke so tellingly.

3. This new missionary adventure is rooted in the "contemplation of the face of Christ", which is the core of the legacy that the experience of the Great Jubilee leaves us (cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, n. 15). There must be a great new movement of contemplation among all the baptized and everywhere in Oceania! May the inhabitants of the Pacific repeat unceasingly: "Your face, Lord, do I seek" (Ps 26,8)! May they joyfully proclaim, with the Gospel: "We have seen the Lord" (Jn 20,25)! From the depths of contemplation comes the spirituality and the experience of communion which the bishops emphasized at the Special Assembly. They brought with them the rich array of their experiences and cultural treasures, and in turn they were strengthened by the bond of *communion*, at the local and universal level. For them it was a source of deep renewal and encouragement for the future (cf. *Ecclesia in Oceania*, n. 9). Communion is the form of the

mission; it will supply the necessary energy for the new evangelization. May the Church in your countries show great ingenuity and courage when she sets out once again on the deep of the Pacific! For the Lord's commandment is clear "*Duc in altum!*" {*Put out into the deep*} (Lk 5,4).

4. Dear brothers and sisters, as you sail the waves of the ocean of the future, you are not alone. The universal Church goes with you. The "great cloud of witnesses" (Heb 12,1), which constitutes the Communion of Saints surrounds you. The saints of Oceania, who reflect God's glory, "who have shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (II Cor 4,6), are close to you: St Peter Chanel, Blesseds Diego Luis de San Vitores, Pedro Calungsod, Giovanni Mazzuconi, Mary MacKillop and Peter To Rot. In their burning love, may they continue to intercede for the peoples for whom in burning love they lived and died! At the heart of the Communion of Saints we find the Mother of Christ, *Star of the Sea*, particularly venerated by the peoples of the Pacific. I especially entrust to her the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Oceania*. May Mary, Help of Christians and Queen of Peace and all the saints, support you, bishops, priests, religious and lay faithful, when you are putting into practice in the scattered places of your vast territories the teachings and instructions of this document. As a pledge of grace and peace in the Son of God, "he who holds the seven stars in his right hand" (Apoc 2,1), I warmly impart my Apostolic Blessing to you.