



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

REGINA CAELI

Second Sunday of Easter, 19 April 1998

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. In today's Gospel passage we read that Jesus appeared to the Apostles in the Upper Room and said to them: "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (Jn 20:22-23). With these words, the risen Christ calls the Apostles to be *messengers and ministers of his merciful love* and from that day, from generation to generation, this proclamation of hope has resounded in the heart of the Church for every believer. Blessed are those who open their hearts to divine mercy! The Lord's merciful love precedes and accompanies every act of evangelization and enriches it with extraordinary fruits of conversion and spiritual renewal.

2. In every corner of the world the way of the Christian people is marked by *the constant action of divine mercy*. This happened in the early communities and likewise in the Church's later developments on the various continents. Today our attention is focused in particular on the signs of mercy which God worked and continues to work in Asia. In fact this morning's solemn Eucharistic celebration in St Peter's Basilica opened the Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops.

The theme chosen for this Synod Assembly is "*Jesus Christ the Saviour and his Mission of Love and Service in Asia: 'that they may have life, and have it abundantly' (Jn 10:10)*". This is a most appropriate theme for Asia, especially in view of its many religions and cultures, its variety of economic and political situations. It is an enormous land, open to the proclamation of salvation in Jesus Christ and to the witness of Christian solidarity towards peoples who are often sorely tried. At this time I am thinking particularly *of the peoples of North Korea*, exhausted by hunger and hardship: as I urge the Church's charitable organizations to take responsibility for this difficult situation, I hope that the international community will also provide the necessary assistance.

3. Let us entrust to Mary, Mother of the Church, the work of the Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops. May

she, who was at the heart of the apostolic community as a teacher of prayer and communion, obtain an abundant outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Synod Fathers and on all the Christian communities throughout the Asian continent. May Our Lady, *Mother of Divine Mercy*, also enable us to accept with open hearts the gift of merciful love that the risen Christ offers all believers, so that his mercy and his peace may mark the present and the future of all humanity.

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