



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC PILGRIMAGE TO INDIA

**MASS WITH THE BISHOPS OF THE ECCLESIASTICAL
PROVINCES OF DELHI AND AGRA**

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

*Indira Gandhi Stadium in Delhi
Sunday, 2 February 1986*

“O gates, lift high your heads; / grow higher, ancient doors. / Let him enter, the King of glory!”.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

1. These words of the Psalm of today's liturgy are addressed to the ancient temple in Jerusalem. The doors of the temple must be opened wide for the King of glory to enter. In the feast that we are celebrating, the Presentation of the Lord, we commemorate the first time that the King of glory entered his temple in Jerusalem as the Incarnate Word.

Today we are gathered together in the capital of India, at the foot, as it were, of the highest mountains of the world. And on this occasion we address the Psalmist's invocation to another temple of God, to the temple that is the whole world, visible and invisible. God is present in this world, yet he wishes to draw nearer still. So let the peaks of the Himalaya mountains, “the roof of the world”, be lifted up at the Lord's coming. At the same time, may the doors of the very ancient cultures whose cradle is this land open before the Lord.

God is present in the very heart of human cultures because he is present in man – in man who is created in his image and who is the architect of culture. God is present in the cultures of India. He has been present in all the people who have contributed by their experiences and aspirations to the formulation of those values, customs, institutions and arts which comprise the cultural heritage

of this ancient land.

And the King of glory wishes to enter into these cultures ever more completely; he wishes to enter every human heart that will open itself to him:

“O gates, lift high your heads; / grow higher, ancient doors. / Let him enter, the King of glory!”.

2. Yes, on this feast of the Presentation God enters into his temple as “the King of glory”. But “who is the King of glory?” . Today’s feast reveals to us the answer.

Let us look at Mary and Joseph carrying to the temple in Jerusalem a baby. It is the fortieth day after his birth. And they are presenting him in the temple to fulfil a precept of the law. But much more than the law is being fulfilled by their obedience. The prophecies of old are all being, fulfilled. For Mary and Joseph are bringing to the temple the “light of all the nations”.

God enters the temple not as a powerful ruler but as a little child in his Mother’s arms. The King of glory comes not with a show of human force and power, not with a great fanfare and noise, not causing fright and destruction. He comes into the temple as he came into the world, as an infant in silence, in poverty, and in the company of the poor and the wise.

God comes as a little child – God the Creator of all, the all powerful Lord of heaven and earth, the King of glory. The first entrance of God into the temple of his people is wrapped in the mystery of littleness, his power hidden in simplicity and helplessness. His coming is completely shrouded in mystery.

3. Unexpectedly, from the very centre of the mystery, a voice is heard. The aged Simeon speaks, for the Gospel tells us: “The Holy Spirit was upon him” . Simeon therefore speaks as a prophet. What he utters is astonishing. He breaks forth in praise of God, saying: “Lord, now... my eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel”.

These are surprising words to be said about an infant. Yet Simeon’s prophecy is true And the words of the Psalm are fulfilled. He who has entered into the temple in Jerusalem, as an infant, will become the light and the salvation of the whole world. In this way, bringing light and salvation he comes as the King of glory.

4. But how will this King establish his “Kingdom of glory” on earth? In what way would Jesus who was born in Bethlehem become the light and salvation of the world? Simeon answers the question when he speaks about “a sign of contradiction”. These words reveal the whole Messianic path of Christ from his birth until his death on the Cross.

Though Jesus is the light for revelation to all the nations, yet he is destined in his own time, and in every age, to be a sign that is spoken against, a sign that is opposed, a sign of contradiction. This had been true of the Prophets of Israel before him. It was true of John the Baptist and it would be true of the lives of those who would follow him.

He performed great signs and miracles – healing the sick, multiplying the loaves of bread and the fishes, calming storms, raising the deads to life. Crowds flocked to him from everywhere, and they listened to him attentively, for he spoke with authority. Yet he encountered bitter opposition from those who refused to open their hearts and minds to him. Ultimately the most tangible expression of this contradiction is found in his suffering and death on the Cross. The prophecy of Simeon proved true. It was true of the life of Jesus and it is true of the life of his followers, in every land and in every age.

5. Thus the Cross becomes the light; the Cross becomes salvation. Is this not the Good News for the poor and for all who know the bitter taste of suffering? Here in India, and in many other places in the world, there are millions of poor people, and they share in the Cross of Christ because Christ on the Cross has taken to himself all the crosses of the world. There is the cross of hunger by which countless men, women and children are deprived of their “daily bread”, and parents’ hearts are filled with anguish as they see their children undernourished or even dying in infancy. So many others live in poverty and suffering, where they are victims of disease and where they are powerless and subject to despair.

Yet the cross of poverty, the cross of hunger, and the cross of every other suffering, can be transformed, for the Cross of Christ has become a light in our world. It is a light of hope and salvation. It gives meaning to all human suffering. It brings with it the promise of everlasting life freed from pain and sin. The Cross was followed by the Resurrection. Death was conquered by life. And all who are joined with the crucified and risen Lord can expect to share in this same victory.

The Cross of Christ won freedom for us from the slavery of sin and death. This freedom, this liberation, is so fundamental and all embracing that it calls for freedom from all the other forms of slavery which are linked to the introduction of sin into the world. This liberation calls for a struggle against poverty. And it requires all who belong to Christ to engage in persevering efforts to relieve the sufferings of the poor. That is why the Church’s mission of evangelization includes energetic and sustained action for justice, peace and integral human development. Not to assume these tasks would be to betray the work of evangelization; it would be infidelity to the example of Jesus who came “to preach good news to the poor”; it would be in effect a rejection of the consequences of the Incarnation, in which “the Word became flesh”.

6. The Church in India has for many years been making important contributions to the development of this country and to the alleviation of the problems of the poor. The work of Mother

Teresa of Calcutta and many others bears eloquent testimony to this commitment, as do the impressive records of achievement of the many Catholic institutions of education, health and service.

At the same time, Christians here and abroad have applauded the efforts made by many others in India to relieve the burdens of misery and to overcome attitudes and structures which have kept millions enslaved in poverty. There is the monumental contribution of Mahatma Gandhi, who helped break down social barriers and divisions and made possible a new era of unity and advancement. "We are all equal. It is the touch of sin that pollutes us and never that of a human being. None are high and none are low for one who would devote his life to service" . He stands as a symbol of the highest qualities and values of the Indian people, and is admired in every country of the world. Rabindranath Tagore, too, helped shape the spirit of modern India. While appreciating the importance of technology and material progress, he helped you to prize the primacy of spiritual values.

7. Many others could be mentioned as well, people who have played an important role in the uplifting of the poor, people who are dear to your own hearts and who in many cases are deeply respected and admired throughout the world.

The noble efforts of these great men and women of India, efforts aimed at fostering social liberation and integral human development are in accord with the spirit of the Gospel. All who have advanced the dignity and freedom of their brothers and sisters are blessed in the eyes of Christ, the King of glory. By their efforts, such people help to bring about a civilisation of love, where the rich willingly share with the poor, where the poor can be free from hunger and want, and where everyone comes to realise that "man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" .

8. But such a civilisation does not yet fully exist, and numerous obstacles block its total realisation. On this Solemnity of the Presentation of the Lord, when we contemplate the coming of the Lord to his temple, we must heed the words of the Prophet Malachi, proclaimed in the first reading of today's liturgy: "The Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple... But who can endure the day of his coming?... for he is like a refiner's fire and like fuller's soap; he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver".

So many problems of social life in India and throughout the world need refinement and purification. Individuals and groups need healing and reconciliation. Ignorance and prejudice must be replaced by tolerance and understanding. Indifference and class struggle must be turned into brotherhood and committed service. Discrimination based on race, colour, creed, sex or ethnic origin must be rejected as totally incompatible with human dignity. Yes, the Lord will come to purify our minds and hearts, to refine our motives. Let us welcome him gladly and accept his grace of repentance.

9. Venerable brothers and dear brothers and sisters: brother bishops, priests, religious and lay men and women from the Archdioceses of Delhi and Agra, from the Dioceses of Ajmer and Jaipur, Allahabad, Bijnor, Gorakhpur, Jhansi, Jullundur, Lucknow, Meerut, Simla and Chandigarh, Udaipur and Varanasi, from the Prefecture Apostolic of Jammu and Kashmir and from the Kingdom of Nepal: today, on the Solemnity of the Presentation of the Lord the peaks of the tallest mountains of the world lift high. The doors of the most ancient cultures of our earth are opened. Welcome him whom Mary and Joseph bring to us in the mystery of today's liturgy.

He is "sign of contradiction".

But he is also the "light of revelation to the Gentiles".

He is the "light of the world":

- by his birth in poverty on that night in Bethlehem,
- by the Gospel of the Eight Beatitudes,
- by his Cross and the Resurrection.

Truly he has been made like us, his brothers and sisters. He has been made like the sons and daughters of this ancient land. "For because he himself has suffered and been tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted". He is able to help all of us. He takes care of all, just as he takes care of the offspring of Abraham. He takes care of us finally through the heart of his Mother, Mary. At the foot of the Cross, his Mother's heart was "pierced through... that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed" .

Jesus Christ is the light that reveals the thoughts of our hearts.

Jesus Christ is the truth that liberates.

Let us welcome him.

Let us welcome him with faith and with love. Amen.

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