



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC PILGRIMAGE TO INDIA

MASS FOR CATHOLIC PEOPLE OF WEST BENGALA

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Brigade Parade Grounds Park of Calcutta

Tuesday, 4 February 1986

1. "He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor".

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

These are the words originally written by the Prophet Isaiah as he thought about the future Messiah. Messiah means "Anointed One". But here is meant not just an anointing with oil, but an anointing with the Holy Spirit.

And so the Prophet says: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor" .

Anointing with oil signifies the granting of power. The Messiah is the one who is anointed with the Holy Spirit and who comes in the power of the Holy Spirit. He brings to people the Spirit of Truth and the power of this Spirit.

The Messiah is Christ: Jesus Christ. Jesus of Nazareth. Precisely there, in Nazareth, Jesus reads the words of the Prophet Isaiah about the Messiah, about anointing with the Holy Spirit. And he says to his fellow-townfolk gathered in the synagogue in Nazareth: "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" . It was fulfilled in him.

2. Jesus of Nazareth is the one "whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world" The

prophecies concerning him have been fulfilled. The expectations of Israel and of the whole of humanity have been fulfilled in him. For he, Jesus Christ, has brought the fullness of life which is from God himself. It is the fullness of life for the spirit, for every created spirit. God, who is himself the infinitely perfect Spirit, opens this fullness before humanity in the Holy Spirit.

Already at the creation of the world " . the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters" , as the Book of Genesis relates. And man created in the image and likeness of God has been called, from the beginning, to share, by the power of the Holy Spirit, in the life of God by grace.

When sin sprang up between the human heart and the holiness of God – the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit – the path to this fullness of life which is from God could be reopened only through the Redemption.

The Redemption of humanity! The Redemption of the world! He who was foretold by Isaiah is the Redeemer. The anointing with the Holy Spirit signifies the power of the Redemption. Only at the price of the Redemption, at the price of the Cross of Christ, could humanity regain this life which is from God, the life which was lost because of sin, the life which is communicated to the human spirit in the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ, through his Death and Resurrection, has revealed this life. He has left it for all people in the mystery of his Church. In this way the Good News of salvation is accomplished: man shares in the divine nature. He receives the life which is from God and receives it "abundantly" .

3. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ our Redeemer: it is the fundamental mission of the Church to proclaim to the world the Good News of the Redemption. And this is why I have come to you: to celebrate with you, especially in the Eucharist, the redemptive mystery of the Passion and Resurrection of Christ, and to encourage you in your efforts to bear witness to this mystery before the world.

In offering to others the Good New of the Redemption, the Church strives to understand their culture. She seeks to know the minds and hearts of her hearers, their values and customs, their problems and difficulties, their hopes and dreams. Once she knows and understands these various aspects of culture, then she can begin the dialogue of salvation; she can offer, respectfully but with clarity and conviction, the Good News of the Redemption to all who freely wish to listen and to respond. This is the evangelical challenge of the Church in every age.

In visiting India I am happy to come to this great city of its Eastern Region. In the rich mosaic of your many peoples, the people of this region show a distinctive character, and they have contributed in an important way, through the vitality of their culture, to the nation's history and its dynamism.

From this region have arisen great statesmen and leaders, eminent spokesmen of the aspirations

and ideals of your people as they sought national independence and unity. From this region, too, have come artists, poets, and men and women of letters who have spoken to the minds, hearts and imaginations of their countrymen, rousing them to a sense of self-worth and dignity, calling them to values which demand sacrifice and discipline.

4. This region has also produced eminent religious thinkers, among them the well-known Nobel Prize winner, Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore. These people have helped foster a religious and cultural refinement which has enriched the life of the country. The Church holds them in esteem, together with the religions which they represent. As Pope Paul VI once said of non-Christian religions: "They carry within them the echo of thousands of years of searching for God... They possess an impressive patrimony of deeply religious texts. They have taught generations of people how to pray. They are all impregnated with innumerable 'seeds of the Word' and can constitute a true preparation for the Gospel" .

While esteeming the value of these religions, and seeing in them at times the action of the Holy Spirit who is like the wind which "blows where it wills" , the Church remains convinced of the need for her to fulfil her task of offering to the world the fullness of revealed truth, the truth of the Redemption in Jesus Christ.

5. Isaiah speaks and Jesus makes the words of the Prophet his own when he proclaims them at Nazareth: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord"

The Church in Bengal and all India has sought, in various ways, to put into practice this Messianic programme of Jesus Christ, by following her age-old apostolic tradition and meeting the concrete needs of the actual place. I am thinking for example of the significant contribution made by the Church here in the field of education. Last year, Saint Xavier's College in this city celebrated the completion of a hundred and twenty-five years of service, and it was noteworthy that the entire City and State joined in the celebrations which were honoured by the President of India himself.

The Jesuit Fathers, who are serving in many institutions besides Saint Xavier's College, were soon followed by the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary, better known as the Loreto Nuns. They opened their first school for girls in 1842, and to this day the quality of their educational institutions is well known and appreciated. Many other religious congregations of men and women have since followed and shared in the same well-deserved reputation of excellence and generosity.

All the initiatives of education and service which the Church has undertaken in this region, under the leadership of the bishops, have been made not only on behalf of Christians but of everyone living here. Your institutions, staffed by religious, lay Christians and their collaborators, have helped people of all conditions and creeds. In performing these services you have borne witness

to the Gospel of the Redemption. And you have greatly contributed to the unity and development of society.

6. In our time, the Messianic programme of Jesus of Nazareth, the programme of the Gospel, has found precisely here in India, and particularly in Calcutta, an affirmation which is especially eloquent and at the same time a witness. It is a witness which the whole world watches, a testimony which smites the conscience of the world. I am speaking of the witness of the life and work of one, who although she was not born in India is now known as Mother Teresa of Calcutta. Some years ago, impelled by the love of Christ and a desire to serve him in those suffering the greatest distress and pain, she went forth from one of the educational institutions to establish the Missionaries of Charity. This type of evangelical service to the poorest of the poor fulfils in a concrete way the Messianic programme of Jesus, to bring "good news to the poor" . It has given the world a compelling lesson in compassion and genuine love of our neighbour in need. It has shown the power of the Redemption to inspire men and women to heroic service and to sustain them in it year after year.

Such charity and self-sacrifice, done out of love for Christ, challenges the world, a world which is all too familiar with selfishness and hedonism, with greed for money, prestige and power. In the face of the evils of our modern age, this testimony proclaims not with words but by deeds and sacrifice the preeminent value of love, the love of Christ our Redeemer. It calls the sinner to conversion and invites him to follow the example of Christ, "to preach good news to the poor" .

7. But who are the poor of today's world? The Gospel speaks of " the blind", " the captives " and " those who are oppressed " . And the poor includes all those who live without the basic physical or spiritual necessities of life. In the contemporary world, too, there are millions of refugees exiled from their homelands, and millions more, sometimes complete tribes or peoples, facing total extinction due to drought and famine. And who could fail to recognise the poverty of ignorance suffered by those who never have the opportunity to study? Or the utter powerlessness felt by countless people in the face of injustice and underdevelopment? And there are countless people who are deprived of their right to religious freedom and suffer immensely because they cannot worship God according to the dictates of an upright conscience.

Our age also faces numerous kinds of moral poverty which threaten the freedom and dignity of the human person, like the poverty of those who live without perceiving the meaning of life, the poverty of a misguided or erroneous conscience, the poverty of broken homes and separated families, the poverty of sin.

In this modern world which suffers so many forms of poverty, the Church seeks to "preach good news to the poor". And it does so through the efforts of people like Mother Teresa and others like her, whose love of Christ and service to the poorest of the poor is profoundly prophetic, profoundly evangelical. Such work of self-sacrifice and Christian love is indeed an eloquent way "to proclaim

the acceptable year of the Lord" . It is for me and for all the Church an "encouragement in Christ", an "incentive of love", a "participation in the Spirit" .

8. And so, upon seeing this work here, in Calcutta, here where it was born from the great love of Christ in the heart of a simple servant of the Lord, I wish to make my own the exhortation which the Apostle Paul directed to the Christians in Philippi:

"If there is any encouragement in Christ, any incentive of love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind" .

Were the words of the Apostle of the Gentiles written only for the Church in Philippi? Only for the Church in Calcutta? No! For all the Churches of the whole world! For all Christians! For the followers of all religions. For all people of good will.

This is the testimony of fraternal love. This is the exhortation of Saint Paul: "Complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfishness or conceit" .

Do nothing to perpetuate hatred, injustice or suffering! Do nothing in favour of the arms race! Nothing to promote the oppression of peoples and nations! Nothing inspired by hypocritical forms of imperialism or inhuman ideologies.

Let those who have no voice finally speak!

Let India speak!

Let Mother Teresa's poor and all the poor of the world speak!

Their voice is the voice of Christ! Amen.

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