



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC PILGRIMAGE TO INDIA

**MASS FOR THE FAITHFUL OF THE ECCLESIASTICAL
DISTRICT OF THE «GRAN COCHIN»**

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Friday, 7 February 1986

*There is "one God and Father of us all,
who is above all and through all and in all".*

Beloved Brothers and Sisters,

1. My greetings to you in the love of Christ! I am very happy to come to this part of Kerala and see you. And as I set foot on your hospitable land, I wish, together with you, to give glory to this "one God" who is Father of us all. To this God to whom the earth and the whole universe belong. As the Psalm says:

"The Lord's are the earth and all it holds;
the world and all those who dwell in it" .

And so, brothers and sisters, may our Eucharistic assembly become a single voice that gives glory to God, the Creator, the Father. Let us speak his glory in the name of all his creatures, for they all belong to him. Especially, let us speak his glory in the name of this land of yours and those who live in it.

2. You have assembled here from different parts of Kerala, the cradle of Christianity in India. This entire region, intersected by rivers, lakes and canals, fringed by palms, with beautiful hills covered with a rich and varied vegetation, offers the pilgrim a sight of graceful charm. Here, people of various religions have sought to live in unity and mutual help. Your composite culture and the rich

traditions of family life have left their mark of spiritual vitality on the social and religious life of the region.

In this context we are gathered to celebrate the Most Holy Eucharist. Thus this place becomes a holy place of God; a place of his presence, of the Sacrifice of Christ:

"Who shall stand in his holy place?

He who has clean hands and a pure heart...

Such is the generation of those who seek him,
who seek the face of the God of Jacob".

We are the generation of today who seek the face of the Living God. This quest gives direction to our whole earthly journey, our pilgrimage through life. The quest for the face of the Living God is the pilgrim path for the Church of Jesus Christ, built on the foundation of the Apostles. It is the path of the Church in Kerala.

3. Christianity in Kerala has continued down through the centuries in the community of the Saint Thomas Christians. It has grown strong through the activities of the sons and daughters of the Church who have contributed to her consolidation through their holiness and zeal. It is particularly indebted to Saint Francis Xavier who laboured in this area from 1542 to 1545. The Church in Kerala with her tradition of service in the educational, medical, social, developmental and charitable fields, gives a bright witness to the Gospel message.

Today the descendants of these apostles must ask themselves this question: In what condition is the faith that has been given to us? The members of the Churches and Christian communities present in Kerala have before them the example of Saint Thomas. Overcoming his difficulties he confessed his faith with the vibrant expression: "My Lord and my God ". It is our sacred task to proclaim this faith with one voice, together with the Apostle Thomas, and to build up that one Church desired by Christ in his priestly prayer: "that they may all be one".

4. In its deepest sense, the unity of the Church is a gift of the Father through Christ, "the source and centre of ecclesiastical communion" . It is Christ who shares with us his Spirit, and the Spirit "vivifies, unifies and moves the whole body".

This inner unity is wonderfully expressed in the words of the Apostle which have just been read to us: "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all".

Splendid, inspiring words!

In fact, these words proclaim the task of the Church in every age and in every generation. The Church's sacred duty is to preserve this unity, which is none other than the fullness of fidelity to her Lord. And she must strive to restore this unity where it has been weakened or tarnished.

This fundamental unity in no way excludes legitimate variety. You are living witnesses to the variety of liturgical and spiritual traditions and of ecclesiastical discipline which form pattern of the Church's presence in Kerala.

5. At this stage of my pilgrimage I wish to greet the bishops, priests, men and women religious, and the lay people of the local Churches represented here:

- the Archdiocese of Ernakulam and the Diocese of Kothamangalam of the Syro-Malabar rite;
- the Archdiocese of Verapoly, whose centenary is being celebrated this year, and the Dioceses of Cochin and Alleppey of the Latin rite.

I cordially greet also the members of the venerable Churches and Ecclesial Communities with whom the Catholic Church enjoys different degrees of ecclesial communion. May the Holy Spirit, the living principle of the Church's unity, purify our hearts so that we may gladly recognise all that unites us.

6. The focal point of ecclesial unity is the person of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He is the "cornerstone" of God's building which is the Church. He – the "cornerstone" of the new People of God, of the whole of redeemed humanity – is present in this Eucharistic community. He draws us to himself, and therefore to unity among ourselves.

Let us listen to the words of his priestly prayer at the Last Supper. He is speaking to the Father:

"O Father most holy, keep them in your name, which you have given to me, that they may be one, even as we are one".

Jesus pleads with the Father whose "name" he has made known to the disciples. Since he himself will no longer be "in the world" with them, he asks the Father to keep them united in the knowledge of the word which he has handed on to them. The object of his prayer is above all the unity of those whom he had chosen – the Apostles. But it extends to all his followers in every age. As he pleads with the Father he says: "I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one".

Brothers and sisters, we are included in that prayer of Jesus: that they may all be one.

But he goes on to indicate the condition of that fundamental unity. In this prayer Jesus says: "For

their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be consecrated in truth". Unity is founded on truth, on the truth of the "word" which he has revealed, on the truth of the very Word of the Father which in fact he, the Saviour, is.

The truth of his Word is given to the Church through Christ and through the Apostles who were sent to baptise and to teach in his name: "As you have sent me into the world, so I send them into the world". Our unity is not for ourselves alone, it is directed to the entire world: so that the world may believe that the Father has sent his Son, for his eternal glory and for our salvation.

7. Our unity is the source of our joy and peace. Division, on the other hand, and discord, and especially hatred, are totally opposed to unity. They are evils, and ultimately they are linked to the evil one. In the same prayer Jesus asked the Father to preserve the disciples from the evil one. So, the priestly prayer that exalts the goodness of unity becomes at the same time a fervent plea that everything opposed to unity will be overcome. It is therefore a prayer for reconciliation.

For reconciliation in many forms:

- within man himself;
- between individuals;
- between Christians themselves (here we see the role of ecumenism);
- between Christians and non-Christians;
- between nations and states, and between developed and less developed areas of the globe (and this is peace – for "development is the new name of peace").

Reconciliation is a profound experience of the human spirit. In its highest form it is the loving Father stretching out his welcoming arms to the wayward son tempted to try to build a world for himself, out of the range of the Father's influence. The emptiness of this choice, the loneliness, the accompanying loss of dignity – these inflict wounds which cry out for healing, for a return and rediscovery of the Father's mercy: a reconciliation with God, within ourselves, between man and man, between the various Churches and Ecclesial Communities, starting with a profound transformation of heart.

Reconciliation has a social dimension too. It overcomes class feelings, regional rivalries. It abolishes forms of unjust discrimination. Above all, it upholds the unique dignity of every human being and works for the respect of human rights wherever they are threatened.

As citizens of India, a vast country with many languages, customs and religions, you certainly

realise the essential importance of a true spirit of reconciliation and communal peace. This is the spirit that you find in the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi.

8. In obedience to her Founder, the Church in India must be the servant of reconciliation:

- servant of the reconciliation of the whole created universe with God, our Creator and our destiny;
- servant of the reconciliation of individuals among themselves, helping them to overcome the divisions that wound the human heart, and helping them to tear down the barriers that keep people apart and lead to despair;
- servant of reconciliation in the world, in the face of ever increasing tensions which threaten the very survival of civilisation.

In this spirit we should understand the words spoken to us by the Apostle Paul: "I... beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace".

In the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace we are gathered in this assembly: the bishops of this region of Kerala, successors of the Apostles, with the successor of Peter; the priests, religious and laity. We acknowledge our baptismal unity with all our Christian brethren in the faith of Christ, and we proclaim our solidarity with our Hindu and Muslim brothers and sisters, and the followers of other religious traditions, whose presence expresses a shared determination to work for a world built on truth, justice and peace for all. We greet with respect the civil authorities and the representatives of all sectors of cultural and public life in this region, on whom we ask God's blessings in their endeavours to serve the common good.

As a community in Christ we are assembled under the sign of unity and reconciliation which has its most intense expression in the Eucharistic celebration. Here Christ consecrates himself so that we may be consecrated in truth.

In the spirit of unity and reconciliation we lift up our hearts to the "one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all".

To him be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

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