



The Holy See

SOLEMN CLOSING OF THE SPECIAL ASSEMBLY

OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS FOR ASIA *HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II Thursday, 14 May 1998* 1. "*Iubilate Deo, Omnis*

terra, psalmum dicite gloriae nominis eius" (Ps 65[66]:1-2). The Synodal Assembly which is about to conclude, like the others which I have already convoked in preparation for the Great Jubilee of the Year Two Thousand, intends to respond to the exhortation addressed to us in today's Liturgy: "Acclaim God, all the earth, sing psalms to the glory of his name".

The psalmist invites the earth to praise God; and we, in the epochal period which we are living, feel in a particular way the need to give glory to Him. This is the primary reason why the Bishops of the Church meet in regional and continental synodal assemblies. After the Synod for Africa, which took place four years ago, the Special Assembly for Lebanon took place in 1995. In the autumn of last year the Assembly for America was held, with representatives from the Episcopacies of the North, Central and South America and the Caribbean reflecting and discussing among themselves about the situation of the Church in their countries. Today, however, we are concluding the synodal encounter of the Pastors of the Ecclesial Communities of the Asian continent. This Synod has been in itself a canticle of praise to God. In fact, was this not the primary purpose of our works? We wanted to express, with all of our depth, the glory which the Churches of the vast continent give to God, the Creator and Father. In every corner of the world, in fact, the service of the Church is turned toward the living man, who is the authentic glory of God. God is praised by the lands of Asia and the oceans surrounding them, the Himalayas with the highest peak in the world, and the immense rivers. God is praised by cities rich in millennial traditions, the centuries-old cultures of the continent with civilizations much more ancient than those of Europe. This multiform and silent homage to the Creator finds its definitive achievement in man, who gives glory to God in a way proper to Him, exclusive and unrepeatable. The synodal experience brings forth clearly that those living in each and every corner of Asia - from India to China, from Japan to Indochina, from Indonesia to all the other Nations, from the heights of Tibet to the deserts of Central Asia - when they interpret the ineffable mystery of the pluri-millennial and varied Asian religious traditions, try to express it in prayer and contemplation. 2. "I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should last" (Jn 15:16). At the Cenacle, on the eve of His Passion, Jesus entrusted the task of continuing His mission among men to the Apostles. Thanks to the faithful participation of numerous witnesses to the Gospel, His Word of salvation has spread almost everywhere in the world, during the last two millennia. In the text which we have just heard, the Lord emphasizes that He Himself chose and appointed His disciples, so that they may go out into the whole world and bring lasting fruits of salvation. One of these was Saint Matthew, whose feast day we celebrate today. After Judas' betrayal, he joined the eleven Apostles, to become a "witness to the Resurrection" of Christ. We have received little information about him; we only know that he proclaimed the Gospel with courage and that he died the death of a martyr. According to tradition, the Apostle Thomas was the one to bring the Gospel to India and to the heart of Asia. Since then, many missionaries have traveled through the immense Asian continent and have undertaken evangelization there, proclaiming Christ Jesus, the Word made flesh, who died on the Cross and rose again on the third

day to save the world. Witnesses of the Lord's Resurrection, they showed new ways to peoples who, by reason of their philosophical and religious traditions, were used to seeking the Absolute in the depths of their being. The evangelizers followed the Apostle Paul's example, echoing his exhortation: "Since you have been raised up to be with Christ, you must look for the things that are above" (*Col 3:1*).³ If it is true that God is in the world and that He has a certain degree of immanence, it is above all true that He is Transcendent, "above" the world, and that He cannot be identified in the world alone. One must not only look for Him in the world as if He were just the most profound mystery of all visible things. On the contrary, one must first of all look for Him "on high": He is the Lord of heaven and earth. In virtue of this absolute transcendence, the Son of God descended to the earth; He was made man by being born of a Virgin; He lived and He suffered death for the Truth that He announced. Moreover, in truth, he did not suffer death, but He confronted it. He did not want it to overcome Him, but He broke its chains; He returned to His Father whence He came. This way, Christ showed men living on earth that their destiny is union with God: created in the image and likeness of God, the human being can only be fulfilled in union with Him, the Redeemer and Saviour. Yes, in Jesus Christ, the Father created the world; in Him, He redeemed it. By His death and Resurrection, Christ proclaimed and achieved the truth about creation and redemption, truth which is the content of the permanent mission entrusted to the Church.⁴ This is the saving truth which Jesus passed on to the disciples together with "his" commandment: "that you love one another as I have loved you" (*Jn 15:12*). Dear Brothers and Sisters, you who have formed the Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops! Today the Crucified and Risen Lord again repeats these same words to you, summoning you once more to evangelize your continent. To you in a special way, my Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate, he says: "I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should last" (*Jn 15:16*). And to everyone he says: "This is my commandment, that you love one another" (*Jn 15:17*). As the Successor of the Apostle Peter, I have the honour and joy to echo these words, having shared with you in these past days the extraordinary experience of the Synod. Together we have experienced anew the love of Christ, and together we have seen the fruits of the Holy Spirit's power at work in Asia. The Church's mission of evangelization is a service of love to the Asian continent. And although the Christian community is but "a little flock" in the total population, it is the means through which God pursues his saving plan, which he will bring to completion if he finds that everyone is ready to work with him with generous heart. Dear friends, this is precisely why I wish to say to you once more: remain in the Lord's love, like branches of the vine (cf. *Jn 15:5*), and then among the peoples of Asia you will bear the abundant fruit of new life.⁵ Among the peoples of that Continent I cannot fail to mention, in particular, the Chinese nation, which is the most numerous. To you, Brothers and Sisters of the Catholic Church that is on Mainland China, I wish to express, once more, my affection and tell you how sorry I am that the Bishop of Wanxian and his Coadjutor could not come to Rome to take part personally in the Synod. Bishop Matthew Duan Yinming's words expressing his loyalty to the Successor of Peter and his communion with the universal Church have touched our hearts. The Synod Fathers, from every country in Asia, always considered their Chinese brothers as being here in spirit, and they hope that present difficulties may soon be overcome and that on some occasion in the near future these Bishops may be able to meet the other Pastors of the Church. We all hope that, as the People's Republic of China gradually opens to the rest of the world, the Church in China will also be permitted to have more contact with the universal Church. We implore the Holy Spirit to pour out his gifts on the Chinese faithful and to lead them to the whole truth (cf. *Jn 16:13*), so that the proclamation of the Gospel in China, even in the midst of much suffering, will bring forth abundant fruit.⁶ In the Liturgy of the Easter season, we read the Acts of the Apostles, which help us to understand how in our time too the Church does not cease to add new chapters to the history of salvation. Just as Saint Luke composed the "Acts" so that future generations of Christians would not forget their apostolic origins, so too have we, with this Synod Assembly, written a fresh page of ecclesial life on the Asian continent in this century. This page is an addition, in a sense,

to the story of the Acts of the Apostles. In surveying the whole of Asia, the work of the Synod has enabled us to see how the Gospel has taken root in that great continent in the course of the last two thousand years. In that continent, Christians remain a numerical minority, it is true; and such a situation stands as a sort of constant challenge to them. It stimulates the Church to offer her witness with special courage. How could we forget that Jesus was born at that unique crossroads of the world where Asia meets both Africa and Europe? He came into the world for all the continents, but for Asia in a special way; and Asia could therefore claim a certain right to pride of place. It was in a part of Asia that Christ lived; there he accomplished the work of the world's redemption; there he instituted the Eucharist and the other sacraments; there he rose again from the dead.⁷ "Out of the men who have been with us the whole time that the Lord Jesus was living with us, from the time when John was baptizing until the day when he was taken up from us" (Ac 1:21-22), Jesus, born in Asia, sowed the seed of salvation for all peoples in that continent. At the end of the second millennium, the path of the successors of the Apostles continues in every corner of the Asian continent, where they proclaim the same truth and do so with the same unchanged apostolic and missionary zeal, repeating and bearing witness: "Jesus Christ is the Saviour". Dear Brothers and Sisters, continue this mission of love and service in Asia. May the maternal protection of Mary, Mother of the Church and of the Asian people, sustain you; may the martyrs, the saints and the beatified of Asia intercede for you. Remain faithful to the love of Christ, who called and appointed you as His disciples "that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should last" (Jn 15:16). Amen! © Copyright 1998 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana