



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE BISHOPS FROM INDIA ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT

Saturday, 23 June 1979 Dear Brothers in our Lord Jesus Christ, IT IS DIFFICULT to express adequately the joy that I experience in being together with my brother Bishops during their *ad limina* visits. Each meeting is an encounter with the pastor of a local Church, with the spiritual leader of an individual ecclesial community that has its own identity within the context of Catholic unity. The one, holy, Catholic and apostolic Church subsists in each of your dioceses, and in all of them together. An *ad limina* visit is indeed therefore a celebration of Catholic unity, and a manifestation of fidelity to Jesus Christ, "the chief Shepherd"^[1] of the universal Church. As Successor of Peter and Vicar of Christ, I wish today to greet in your persons all the Catholics of the Region of Tamil Nadu, as well as those represented by the other Bishops who have joined this regional group. I wish, moreover, to render respectful homage to the ancient culture of your land – a culture that is steeped in wisdom, rich in human experience, and filled with spiritual values that point to God and his providence in human history. At a given moment in the life of your people, a unique and original message of revelation was offered and freely accepted by those who were to base their lives on "all that Jesus did and taught until he was taken up to heaven"^[2]. The name of Jesus Christ was preached and his Gospel was proclaimed in your midst His divine person became for many the centre of their lives, and his message of gentleness and humility became the inspiration for their activities. Through the action of the Holy Spirit, the seed of God's word, sown in good "round, brought forth fruits of holiness, justice and love. And God continues to be praised in the marvellous works that his grace has accomplished in India. The word of God, containing the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ, became for ever a great heritage to be preserved and transmitted. It was accepted as a treasure to be passed on from generation to generation. On his part, Jesus spoke as the Father had instructed him; he did nothing on his own^[3]. Indeed, Jesus insists on the fact that he speaks on the authority of his Father: "My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me"^[4]. The transmission of this teaching is entrusted to the action of the Holy Spirit; it is to take place for ever through the Church. The Holy Spirit, whom the Father sends in the name of Jesus, awakens in the Church a realization of its vocation as a community that is called to hear and guard and do the word of God. The transmission of the Gospel becomes the common responsibility of the entire community, living and acting under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The same Holy Spirit who pervades the entire Body of Christ and consolidates it in unity implants in the community a charism of special service – the office of Bishop – which becomes the specific instrument for safeguarding and proclaiming the word of God. And this distinctive role is yours today, dear Brothers, called as you are to govern the Church, together with the Successor of Peter and in the unity of the Episcopal College. Each of you experiences the importance and urgency of Paul's words to Timothy: "Guard the rich deposit of faith with the help of the Holy Spirit who dwells within us"^[5]. This charge constitutes a vital aspect of your own

ministry within and for the benefit of the Church, which in her entirety is directed to the service of the living word of God. In fulfilling your role, you are assisted in the first place by your priests, who are indeed worthy of all your fraternal love and pastoral attention. As your co-workers they too have " as their primary duty the proclamation of the Gospel of God to all"[6]. I ask you to assure them, over and over again, how important a role they play in the fulfilment of the work of redemption. In your local Churches I know that the catechists have a very particular role in the great task incumbent on the whole community – the task of transmitting the word of God. Your leadership in this field is vital: to provide for the doctrinal and spiritual preparation of the catechists, to see that they are themselves trained in the word of Christ, that they are imbued with the mystery of Christ's love, and that they share his zeal for service. Through your guidance, the catechists will understand that at the core of their mission is the urgency of communicating Christ: passing on his word to their brethren, and eliciting a supernatural response of faith, hope and charity. Only by receiving the word of God can the community of the faithful grow to full maturity in Christ the Head. Success in the catechetical field presupposes a consciousness of the common responsibility of the Church – a realization that all the faithful through their Baptism and Confirmation are commissioned by the Lord Jesus himself to share in the apostolate of his Church[7]. Be assured that the Pope supports you and encourages you in your efforts to prepare, sustain and perfect your catechists. And I pray that the Holy Spirit will lead you to find new opportunities to promote this great apostolic activity in your local Churches. In a very special way the transmission of the faith is linked to the training given to students for the priesthood. The fidelity of the Church to her vocation of hearing, guarding and doing the word of God depends on the effectiveness of seminaries. This is why the Second Vatican Council could well speak of the seminary as "the heart of the diocese"[8]. Every ecclesial community is affected by the condition of the seminaries that prepare its priests. The effects of seminary training last for generations. For this reason I recently spoke in Rome to a group of seminary Rectors, expressing clearly my prayerful hopes for this important aspect of the Church's life. On that occasion I stated: "In a word, the first priority for seminaries today is the teaching of God's word in all its purity and integrity, with all its exigencies and in all its power... A second issue of great importance... is that of ecclesiastical discipline"[9]. And these two aspects – doctrine and discipline – I commend today to your pastoral zeal for vigilant promotion. Vocations to the priesthood are a great gift of God to the community of his Church. As Bishops we must vocalize Christ's call to the young; we must encourage our young people to accept a vocation courageously and generously; and we must pray " the Lord of the harvest to send labourers into his harvest"[10]. And with keen responsibility we must promote the vocations that we have already received, by fostering the doctrine and discipline of our seminaries. This solicitude, dear Brother, I manifested last Holy Thursday, saying: "The full reconstitution of the life of the seminaries throughout the Church will be the best proof of the achievement of the renewal to which the Council directed the Church"[11]. Catechetical activity and seminaries – these are indeed two privileged instruments for the Church to fulfil her vocation of transmitting the word of God. Today I associate myself with your zealous efforts in these fields, and with all your other initiatives on behalf of the Gospel. I am also confident that you will enjoy the benevolence and esteem of all men and women of good will in the question of religious freedom. The Vatican Council committed the Church anew to promoting the dignity of the human person, spelling out the exigencies of this natural dignity. And so it declared that the human person "has a right to religious freedom"[12]. In this document the Council feels itself allied with millions of people throughout the world who so sincerely embrace in all its practical applications article eighteen of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights: "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion...". With these hopes and prayers, dear Brothers in the Episcopate, I renew the expression of my profound solidarity with you, in Christ and in the Church. I ask Mary, Mother of God and Mother of the Church, to sustain you in joy and strength, for the glory of her Son and for the generous service of your people. For the rest, Brethren: " Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, who inspires and perfects our

faith"[13].

[1] *1 Petr.* 5, 4. [2] *Act.* 1, 1. [3] Cfr. *Io.* 8, 28. [4] *Ibid.* 7, 16. [5] *2 Tim.* 1, 14. [6] *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 4. [7] Cfr. *Lumen Gentium*, 33. [8] *Optatam Totius*, 5. [9] Ioannis Pauli PP. *Allocutio*, die 3 mar. 1979. [10] *Matth.* 9,38. [11] Ioannis Pauli PP. *Il Epistula ad universos Ecclesiae Episcopos adveniente Feria V in Cena Domini anno MCMLXXIX*, die 8 apr. 1979. [12] *Dignitatis Humanae*, 2. [13] *Hebr.* 12, 2. © Copyright 1979 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

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