



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO KOREA, PAPUA NEW GUINEA,
SOLOMON ISLANDS AND THAILAND **ADDRESS OF POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO BISHOPS OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA
AND SOLOMON ISLANDS** *Saint Joseph's Parish - Port Moresby (Papua New Guinea)*
Tuesday, 8 May 1984

Dear Brothers in our Lord Jesus Christ,

1. I am happy to have this time, in the midst of a busy day of various pastoral activities, to be alone with you, the Successors of the Apostles in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands. It has been a great joy to join you and your people in praising God's name and in thanking the Lord of history for the many blessings which he has bestowed upon the Church in your countries. In particular, I am grateful to the Most Holy Trinity for the opportunity of celebrating the Eucharistic sacrifice here in Port Moresby and in Mount Hagen, and I look forward to the Liturgy which I shall celebrate tomorrow in Honiara. Although I deeply value all the other events that make up this pastoral visit, these are the high points of my time among you. In the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, the Second Vatican Council speaks to us about our own identity when it says: "A Bishop, marked with the fullness of the Sacrament of Orders, is the steward of the grace of the supreme priesthood, especially in *the Eucharist*, which he offers or causes to be offered, and *by which the Church constantly lives and grows*" (*Lumen Gentium*, 26).

2. As we meet here today, I rejoice in the way that God has brought to rich fruition the missionary work of the past century. There has indeed been *a great flowering of the Christian faith on these islands*, despite the many obstacles which must often have seemed insurmountable. I am thinking of various difficulties, including those of travel, lack of roads and communications, and the problems of trying to proclaim Christ to people of hundreds of different languages and dialects. With all my heart I thank you for what you have done and are doing for the Gospel, and for your love of Jesus Christ and his people.

I rejoice, too, in the way that the young missionary Churches are making great strides towards maturity. Examples of this, to mention only a few, are the institution of the ordinary ecclesiastical

hierarchy by Paul VI in 1966 and, more recently, the establishment of the Metropolitan Sees of Honiara and Mount Hagen.

3. The Church in your countries has been endowed by the Holy Spirit with *unity in diversity*. The faithful belong to a great variety of cultures and backgrounds, as is reflected in their many languages and traditions. The missionaries, too, come from all over the world and different religious Institutes. Your dioceses differ widely from one another, in both their historical development and their present pastoral situations. And, in the midst of all this diversity, you are one in faith, hope and charity, one in the doctrine and discipline of the Catholic Church, One in the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

4. One of the many ways in which *this unity is made visible is collaboration and joint action by the Bishop's Conference* of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands. I wish to encourage you in this important collegial endeavour, which is linked to your fraternal charity and your pastoral zeal for the universal mission entrusted to you as Successors of the Apostles. Today, more than ever before in the Church's history, there is a need for a forum in which Bishops can share their insights and experiences, pool their resources, and draw up programmes for meeting the urgent challenges and problems of the Church and society. This need was spelled out by the Second Vatican Council, in these words: "All Bishops are consecrated not just for some one diocese, but for the salvation of the entire world. Christ's mandate to preach the Gospel to every creature (*Marc. 16, 15*) primarily and immediately concerns them, with Peter and under Peter. From this fact arises that communion and cooperation between Churches which is so necessary today for carrying on the work of evangelization. In virtue of this communion, individual Churches carry a responsibility for all the others. They make their necessities known to one another, and keep one another mutually informed regarding their affairs" (*Ad Gentes, 38*).

5. The concrete implementation of this ecclesial communion and joint action by an Episcopal Conference takes on a variety of forms. I would like to point out two which are of particular relevance in our efforts to proclaim the Gospel.

First of all, Episcopal Conferences should *strive to address the major pastoral problems affecting the life of the Church*. After due deliberation and consultation, it is often most helpful to the local Churches, and to priests, religious and catechists, if the Bishops take a common pastoral stand on particular issues. There are many topics that await the clarifying and encouraging teaching of the Bishops. The family, sacraments, evangelization, catechesis and prayer are just examples. Joint pastoral documents give opportunities to present the official doctrine of the Church in clear and understandable terms while taking into consideration the concrete situations and problems. In addition to such initiatives of the Episcopal Conference, I would also encourage you individually, in your dioceses, to make use of the written word in proclaiming the Gospel, and thus to fulfil your role as authentic teachers of Catholic doctrine.

A second matter which cannot be overlooked arises from *our prophetic mission* as Bishops. There are profound links between evangelization and human advancement, for the people we evangelize are at the same time subject to social and economic factors. Thus, it is important to face together questions of the social order, such as human work, political ethics, alcoholism, bureaucratic corruption and so on. In the light of the Gospel, the Church always has something to say on matters touching the common good of society.

6. Allow me, now, to direct your attention to the topic of *the laity*. For many years I have heard of the outstanding contribution to evangelization which has been made by your catechists and lay church leaders. They have made and continue to make a *truly indispensable contribution to the life and mission of the Church in your countries*. Their roles as translators and assistants to the priests and religious are extremely important, as are their proper tasks of catechesis, Christian service and the permeating of society with the leaven of the Gospel. I commend you in your encouragement and support of these lay leaders in your Churches, especially through your training centres which perform an extremely valuable service for catechesis and evangelization.

I am also pleased to know of the many movements which are thriving here. When such movements act in union with the local Church, they are indeed a sign of the Holy Spirit at work among your people, and they can help the laity to integrate the faith more fully into their daily lives. At the same time, these movements require the pastoral guidance and care of the clergy. I know that you are fully aware of this need and have, in recent years, made provision for the appointment of ecclesiastical representatives to such groups, who help them to avoid possible errors and to serve the cause of truth and charity among the faithful.

In speaking of the laity, I cannot fail to mention that vital part of every community: *the family*. In every society today, marriage and family life are threatened by moral and social evils. And yet at no time in history has the stability and vitality of a Christian home been more necessary. As Bishops, we have a great responsibility to assist families and married couples. *Our special service is to proclaim the truth of the Gospel*, to hand on in its purity and entirety the Church's teaching on marriage and family life. We owe it to Jesus Christ never to doubt the power of his grace to triumph in the lives of his people.

7. As I visit your Churches which are so full of promise for the future, I wish to encourage you in your efforts to *foster vocations to the priesthood and religious life*. Your young Churches are moving quickly towards greater responsibility for themselves and less reliance on missionaries and the help of other Christians round the world, and so the need for religious and priestly acute. For the most crucial factor in this time of transition is a steady increase of indigenous vocations, accompanied by careful provision for the spiritual educational and cultural formation of these young men and women.

In this regard, the Major Regional Seminary at Bomana is performing a vital service for the

Church, a service without which the future development of your individual dioceses could not be ensured. As you know, it is important that candidates for ordination and religious life be well prepared to embrace a life of celibacy and be helped to develop a fervent life of prayer built around the Eucharist and the Liturgy of the Hours. I know that the fostering of vocations is a pastoral duty as dear to your hearts as it is to mine. And I assure you of my oneness with you in prayer as you seek to further this vital work. May the Mother of Jesus fill your lives with gladness and hope.

8. Dear Brothers in Christ: it is indeed a great joy to be with you in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands. I thank you for your warm hospitality and for all the preparations which you have made for my pastoral visit. In the bonds of hierarchical communion and collegial service which unite us, in the universal fellowship of charity and faith which binds all the local Churches with one another and with the Lord, *let us go forward* together in the name of Jesus. Let us proclaim together the message of salvation. And let us give praise and glory to God whose "power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, to him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever" (*Eph. 3, 20-21*).

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