



# The Holy See

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## **ADDRESS OF POPE JOHN PAUL II TO THE BISHOPS OF THAILAND ON THEIR «AD LIMINA» VISIT**

*Thursday, 14 November 1985*

*Dear Brother Bishops,*

*“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”! (Phil. 1, 2)*

It gives me great joy to meet you, *the Pastors of the Church in Thailand*, here in Rome for your *ad Limina* visit. Our last meeting took place in your own country during my visit in May 1984, an experience of which I have vivid memories and for which I am grateful to the ecclesial community as also to the people of Thailand and their leaders.

1. “This is indeed the mystery of the Church: *to live Christ’s life and to live it together*”.

That was the basic theme of my conversation with you when we met in Bangkok on 11 May 1984. It is a reflection to which the entire Church must return over and over again, in order to understand ever more fully her own innermost nature and in order to fulfil her specific mission. It is a theme which lies at the very heart of your life and mission as Bishops. *For in you*, the Bishops who have succeeded to the place of the Apostles as shepherds of the Church, “*our Lord Jesus Christ, the supreme High Priest, is present in the midst of those who believe*” (*Lumen Gentium*, 21). Through your ministry, Christ himself builds up the people of the New Testament in faith and Christian life.

It is especially incumbent on Bishops, as “servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God” (1 Cor. 4, 1), to bear authentic witness through *a holiness of life centred on the person of Jesus Christ*, the Mediator who leads the human family back to God and reconciles people among themselves. The call to holiness, which the Second Vatican Council acknowledges as addressed to everyone in the Church, is directed “in the first place” to the shepherds of the flock, who “ought to carry out their ministry with holiness, eagerness, humility and courage, in imitation of the eternal

High Priest” (*Lumen Gentium*, 41). This they do “through prayers, sacrifice and preaching, as through every form of a Bishop’s service” (*Ibid.*).

In recalling these words, I am describing your ministry to the Churches entrusted to your daily care. I know how deeply you love your people and how much you have at heart the well-being of your priests, and that of the religious and laity who share your burdens and duties through generous collaboration. As your brother in the apostolic ministry, I encourage you along this path of ecclesial service. You are certainly aware that the example of *the Bishop’s life* has an immediate impact on the life and zeal of his collaborators and on the progress of the evangelizing task committed to him.

2. My visit to Thailand was a brief one. Nevertheless, in my meetings with His Majesty the King and the members of the Royal Family, as well as with members of the Government, with the Supreme Patriarch and leaders of the various religious traditions, I noted the general atmosphere of good will and freedom in which the Church in Thailand, as a little flock, seeks to live out the Gospel message and at the same time to contribute to the common good of the entire nation. In my meetings with the various ecclesial communities I experienced the lively hope that animates your local Churches. Their Christian vitality will always reflect *how well they live Christ’s life* in spiritual union with him and in effective communion of life with his entire Body, the Church, for “*from him the whole body . . . derives its increase to the building up of itself in love*” (*Eph. 4, 16*).

3. In union with the universal Church, the Church in Thailand shares in the urgent duty of bringing the saving work of Christ into the lives of the people. The Council Decree “*Ad Gentes*” offers many considerations concerning this responsibility which are applicable to your situation.

It is a matter of entering into *the dialogue of salvation* with the world in which the Gospel message is being proclaimed. This dialogue needs the support of *the testimony of authentic Christian living*, and especially *the proof of Christian love*, both within the ecclesial community and in relationship to other civil and religious bodies.

It is a source of comfort for me to acknowledge that you and your collaborators - in the words of the Decree “*Ad Gentes*” - “bear witness to Christ by charity and works of mercy, with all patience, prudence, and great confidence. Thus (you) prepare the way for the Lord and make him present in some manner” (*Ad Gentes*, 6).

This attitude of practical charity and solidarity, made tangible in the numerous educational, social and welfare works sponsored by your dioceses, is a genuine response on your part to the fundamental law of the Gospel: *the law of love*. “If we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us” (*1 Jo. 4, 12*).

Is it not a motive of profound joy in the Holy Spirit that the Church in Thailand, small as it is, is

called above all to make manifest and visible *the “surpassing and merciful kindness”* of the Father, who has “generously poured out his divine goodness and does not cease to do so”? (*Ad Gentes*, 2)

And because God’s love is universal and embraces all people, the apostolate of Christian charity “truly extends to all, without distinction of race, social condition, or religion. It looks for neither gain nor gratitude. For as God has loved us with a spontaneous love, so also the faithful in their charity should care for the human person himself by loving him with the same affection with which God sought out man”. Obedience to this fundamental law is a condition of the fruitfulness of your episcopal ministry and of the well-being of the Churches entrusted to your care.

An important part of your task consists in maintaining and furthering *fraternal relations with your Buddhist brethren*. I express once again in their regard my own *sentiments of esteem and fraternal good will*.

4. As regards *the internal life of the Church*, I wish to refer briefly to a number of pastoral concerns and hopes which we share in our common responsibility for God’s people.

In the first place, I am happy to learn of the increasing numbers of *vocations to the priesthood and to the religious life* which the Spirit of Truth is raising up in your midst. Vocations are a mark of the faith and Christian life of the whole community. They appear especially where family life is based on the Church’s teachings, where the members of the family are trained in Christian virtue, and where they pray together in awareness of their belonging to the wider community of the Church. In this respect parents should be the primary promoters of vocations. Priests and men and women Religious also have a large role to play, by showing their joyful intimacy with Christ, by being close to young people, and by explicitly inviting them to reflect on the priestly ministry and religious consecration as a special way of responding to Christ’s words: “Come follow me” (*Matth.* 19, 21).

A related matter is the question of *the formation of priests and members of Religious Congregations*. I am aware of the attention which you have given to this important aspect of the Church’s life. Every sacrifice of personnel and resources made for this cause will be amply rewarded. I continue to pray for *Lux Mundi National Major Seminary*. I invoke the gifts of the Holy Spirit upon the professors, staff and students, that they may lead a life worthy of the calling to which they have been called (Cfr. *Eph.* 4, 1), and that they may be ever more effective agents of evangelization.

I ask you to take my affectionate greetings to all your priests, and to the men and women religious, both Thai and those from elsewhere, who are generously serving the Lord through the holiness of their lives and through the energy of their apostolate.

5. Another aspect of your ministry in which I wish to encourage your efforts is the care and

attention which you must give to *Christian family life*. In fact, as “*Familiaris Consortio*” indicates, “no plan for organized pastoral work, at any level, must ever fail to take into consideration the pastoral care of the family” (IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Familiaris Consortio*, 70). This is a “real matter of priority, in the certainty that future evangelization depends largely on the domestic Church” (*Ibid.* 65).

The essential form of the Church’s concern for family life is *the proclamation of God’s plan for Christian married couples and for the family*. Each local Church, then, through the parish, through special centres, through the many forms of pastoral support, must endeavour to defend this plan and assist the faithful in its implementation.

Your people’s particular appreciation of harmony in human relations and their spirit of tolerance and respect for each other is a magnificent environment for the development of a strong and loving family life. Their love of children and their special respect for the elderly are qualities which must be preserved and strengthened. In the face of the forces that tend to undermine the stability, fidelity and fruitfulness of marriage, your local Churches are called upon to intensify their catechetical activities in order to instruct the young and those preparing for marriage in the truths and values which sustain the holiness and integrity of married love. The rights and role of women in the family and in society have an important place too in this teaching.

With regard to family life *the value of prayer by the family and for the family* in the heart of the home cannot be overestimated. The awareness of God’s providence at work in the matters of everyday life will be a sure occasion of grace and joy for your people.

6. The Church in Thailand serves the well-being of the Thai people in many ways and the work of your *Catholic schools and educational centres* merits particular encouragement and should be supported and extended as far as possible. By promoting the full human development of their students and by helping them to fit better into their own social and cultural environment, Catholic schools offer a significant contribution to the life of the nation, as has been recognized on many occasions by the highest public authorities.

When education is based on the truth and values of the Gospel, it leads Catholic students to grow and mature in faith and to share more responsibility in the Church’s mission. At the same time, as the Council indicated, “the Church feels a most cordial esteem for those Catholic schools . . . which contain large numbers of non-Catholic students” (*Gravissimum Educationis*, 9). In these schools, Catholic teachers and students have a special opportunity to witness to their own faith, fully recognizing the values expressed in other traditions. The Church in Thailand has much to be grateful for and much to expect from the dedicated work of those engaged in the educational apostolate.

7. During my brief stay in your country, when I visited *the Refugees at Phanat Nikhom* I was able

to see for myself the enormous task to which the Government of Thailand and other national and international organizations are committed in caring for the thousands of persons displaced from their homes by continuing conflict in South East Asia.

I am aware that the situation continues to offer particular cause for concern. I appeal for increased international attention to the needs of these refugees, and I wish at the same time to express my encouragement to the *Catholic Office for Emergency Relief and Refugees* (COERR), which is responding to the immense human tragedy. This is truly a work of love. In the words of the Apostle John: "It is a loyal thing you do when you render any service to the brethren, especially to strangers, who have testified to your love before the Church" (3 Jo. 6).

How can we fail to be grateful to the Church personnel and to the many volunteers working to alleviate the sufferings of so many innocent people and to restore to them a sense of dignity and hope? Nor can we omit a word of thanks to the Organizations and individuals providing needed supplies of food, medicines and clothing, and ensuring educational and other essential services. Above all, let us continue to pray that peace may be restored, so that the fundamental right of peoples to live in freedom and justice in their own homeland is respected.

Dear Brothers in the service of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ: take back to the priests, religious and faithful of your dioceses the assurance of the heartfelt esteem of the Successor of Peter. "I give thanks to God always for you because of the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus" (1 Cor. 1, 4).

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