



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS OF THE LATIN RITE DIOCESES OF KERALA
ON THEIR «AD LIMINA» VISIT**

Friday, 22 November 1985

Dear Brother Bishops,

I am happy to welcome you, the Bishops of the Latin Rite Dioceses of Kerala, who are making your quinquennial visit to the tombs of the Apostles, *ad Limina Apostolorum*. For me this is a moment of profound spiritual communion with your local Churches. I would ask you to take to your priests, Religious and laity my affectionate greetings and the assurance that I look forward with joy to the pastoral visit which, with God's grace, I will make to various parts of India in February of next year.

1. We are meeting almost on the eve of the celebration of the *Extraordinary Synod of Bishops which marks the Twentieth Anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Council*. The Synod "has the purpose of stimulating all the members of the People of God to an ever-deeper awareness of the Council's teachings and to an ever more faithful application of the principles and directives which have issued from that impressive Assembly" (IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Allocutio ad praecationem «Angelus Domini» habita*, die 29 sept. 1985: vide *supra*, p. 802).

In this sense the Synod represents a moment of reflection for the whole Church and a time of further dedication to the ecclesial renewal which the Council intended and for which it offered the necessary teachings and guidelines.

The Latin Rite Dioceses of Kerala too are engaged in the process of assimilating and implementing the doctrinal and pastoral legacy of the Council.

2. *The call to holiness* which the Council presented as directed to all Christians constitutes an

obligation, in the first place, for the Bishops themselves. This holiness is intimately related to your sacramental configuration with Christ and to your faithfulness to him in love and discipleship. “For a bishop”, in the words of Saint Paul, “as God’s steward, must be blameless” (*Tit.* 1, 7).

Indeed, as the Council states: “Bishops in an eminent and visible way undertake Christ’s own role as Teacher, Shepherd and High Priest, and they act in his person” (*Lumen Gentium*, 21). Christ himself is the chief Shepherd of your people (Cfr. *1 Petr.* 5, 4) and in your lives and ministry the faithful wish to see his reflection.

You for your part wish to see the portion of God’s people entrusted to your ministry grow “into a holy temple in the Lord” (*Eph.* 2, 21).

I pray for your Churches, so that under your ministry they may benefit ever more fully from a renewed awareness of *the call to holiness of life*. I pray that you and your priests, the men and women Religious and the laity who collaborate with you in the apostolate may generously respond to Saint Paul’s teaching: “*For this is the will of God, your sanctification*” (*1 Thess.* 4, 3).

3. The Latin Rite Dioceses of Kerala, like the whole Church, have the supreme duty of making known the Gospel message of salvation. *The Church “exists in order to evangelize*, that is to say, in order to preach and teach, to be the channel of the gift of grace, to reconcile sinners with God, and to perpetuate Christ’s Sacrifice in the Mass, which is the memorial of his death and glorious Resurrection” (PAULI VI *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 14).

The ecclesial community itself needs to be constantly evangelized. This is also true of your Dioceses. Your people have strong Christian convictions and traditions. They have a developed sense of their Christian identity. Yet in the face of the many challenges which the Church faces as she approaches the end of the second millennium, there exists a great need for a sustained effort to evangelize and catechize the faithful, especially the young.

In fulfilling this task, the agents of evangelization cannot be content with the methods of the past alone. Social and cultural changes present new demands. On the pastors especially “rests the responsibility for reshaping with boldness and wisdom, but in complete fidelity to the content of evangelization, the means that are most suitable and effective for communicating the Gospel message to the men and women of our times” (*Ibid.* 40).

Allow me to refer briefly to one aspect of evangelization within the ecclesial community: *the important work of catechetical instruction*. Again “*Evangelii Nuntiandi*” reminds us that “the methods must be adapted to the age, culture and aptitude of the persons concerned; they must seek always to fix in the memory, intelligence and heart the essential truths that must impregnate all of life” (*Ibid.* 44).

I ardently wish to encourage you and your collaborators, especially the catechists, to continue to give careful attention to the work of instructing the laity in the faith, with fidelity to the Church's teachings and with resourcefulness in the manner of presenting the message. This is a task of great importance for the well-being of your communities. May the Holy Spirit sustain you in this endeavour!

4. The Gospel message of salvation in Christ is related to the concrete personal and social circumstances in which the hearers of the message are called to put it into practice.

Your people are involved in a process of economic and social development which has already produced fruits of better living conditions and fuller participation in public life for some, but which at the same time serves to highlight the situations that force others to remain on the margin of life. In this situation the Church has the duty of giving witness to *the inalienable dignity of man and of seeking his genuine liberation in justice and evangelical love*.

The liberation which the Church proclaims cannot be exclusively identified with the economic, political, social and cultural dimensions of development. It must always and simultaneously propose and promote the spiritual and eschatological dimension of the salvation offered by Jesus Christ.

In the exercise of the *teaching office* within the Church, through preaching, catechesis and religious instruction in every form, it is essential to present the saving message of the Gospel in its fullness. It is also important that the members of the Church work for the realization of this liberation, each according to the grace received and in conformity with each one's state in life. In particular it devolves upon the laity to transform society and "imbue culture and human activity with moral values" (*Lumen Gentium*, 36).

5. My dear Brother Bishops: I fully recognize the vastness of the task which is yours in making Christ's Kingdom present among your people. Let us *give thanks together to our heavenly Father*, who blesses your Churches with lively ferments of Christian life, with the vitality of your institutions, the abundance of vocations, the witness of holiness and evangelical service of so many priests, Religious and lay men and women. Let us commend your local Churches to the intercession of Mary, Mother of the Church, so that you may all go forward in fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ (Cfr. *1 Io.* 1, 3).

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