



The Holy See

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

Monday, 2 September 1985

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

The words of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ are verified here today: “Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (*Matth. 18, 20*). Yes, *Jesus is in our midst*, for it is in his name that we are gathered, and it is from him that we draw our strength and unity.

1. It was with great satisfaction that I noted in *your document Of basic policies and priorities of the Catholic Church in Japan* the following statement: “We reaffirm that top priority should be given to the announcing of the Gospel and to the evangelization of society and culture”. Indeed, it is *under the sign of evangelization* that we and culture” (June 22, 1984). Indeed, it is under the sign of evangelization that we are assembled here today.

We know that *the whole mission of Jesus* is summed up in his own words: “I must proclaim the Good News of the kingdom of God” (*Luc. 4, 43*). At the same time we know that evangelization is *the essential mission of the Church*. In the words of Paul VI: “Evangelising is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity” (PAULI VI *Evangeliis Nuntiandi*, 14). It is her deepest identity in Japan and everywhere throughout the world.

For this reason I am very close to you in all the efforts that you are making to ensure that evangelization becomes ever more the aim of your whole ecclesial community. Every local Church is truly called to be an evangelising community. It is in the understanding of evangelization that all your pastoral efforts take on increased relevance. The question of proclaiming *salvation in Jesus Christ* as a free gift of God’s love opens up the important questions of the *content*, the *methods*, the *beneficiaries* and the workers of evangelization.

2. The theme of evangelization immediately introduces you to *the great challenge of inculturation*, for which the grace of God is abundantly supplied to you. Hence a whole panorama of ecclesial life opens up before you and urges you to prepare for the national convention for 1987, precisely in order to promote evangelization. You may be assured of my support as you endeavour, in union with the universal Church, to present the message of Christ's revelation as effectively as possible *in the context of Japanese society and culture*.

The power of God's word is so great that a truly evangelised Church immediately realises its call to evangelise. And this in turn involves the question of method and *the incarnation of the Christian message in the lives of each people and each community*. We know the esteem that the Church has for proper inculturation linked to fidelity to the ageless and universal faith. And we know how much Christ himself truly desires, in the members of his body, to become fully one with them. And this is truly what happens as *Christ becomes Japanese in his Church*.

3. To achieve this purpose ever more effectively you are rightly calling for *cooperation and unity*. You are asking for the commitment of all categories in the Church, as you yourselves assume your leadership as the principal evangelisers of God's people. For this reason you are inviting the clergy, religious and laity to be inspired by a single ideal and to work together to attain it. At the basis of this common action there is the urgent need for *witness* and *good example*, which in turn are linked to *holiness of life*.

This holiness of life and the witness that it makes possible are the *common denominator of the evangelising activity* of each category of evangelisers. By the special title of their ordination, *our priests* are called to collaborate in proclaiming the message of salvation and of making known - through word and deed - the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the Kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God. The proclamation of revelation reaches its culmination in the Eucharistic celebration made possible through the ministerial priesthood. *The identity of the priesthood* must always be maintained in its special relationship to proclaiming the Gospel of God (Cfr. *1 Thess. 2, 9*). Hence any program of evangelization must give priority to *the promotion of vocations* to the priesthood. In turn this effort will be advantageous in helping the whole Christian people to reflect on both the nature of the priesthood and on their own responsibility for evangelization. The Church wishes all *the Religious* to realise just how intimately they collaborate in the apostolate of evangelization through the witness of holiness, which is of prime importance. The fidelity of their lives of prayer, work and sacrifice has an effectiveness because all evangelization has its origin in supernatural grace. Contemplative Religious must be invited once more to consider their whole life as an oblation so "that the word of the Lord may speed on and triumph" (*Ibid. 3, 9*).

The renewed emphasis of *the laity* in the work of evangelization is a great grace of the Second Vatican Council. As pastors of God's people, we must, together with our priests, spell out again the consequences of Christian Baptism and Confirmation as they relate to the apostolate of the

laity. We recall those words of Paul VI: “Their own field of evangelising activity is the vast and complicated world of politics, society and economics, but also the world of culture, of the sciences and the arts, of international life, of the mass media” (PAULI VI *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 70). Certainly the availability of the *mass media* in your country is a special blessing for your people to know better the Church in Japan and the universal Church. On my part I am deeply pleased to welcome so many Japanese visitors to the Vatican during the Wednesday General Audiences, and to be known to them by radio and television.

Within the context of the laity, the *Christian family* has its own immense contribution to make to evangelization. The success of families in this regard is linked to their realisation of being the “domestic church” and of having the vocation to evangelise and to be evangelised. All of this corresponds to the deepest supernatural reality of the Church of Christ and to her most sublime identity and mission.

4. What emerges clearly at every stage is that all evangelization - the concerted efforts of priests, religious and laity in union with the Bishops - is a *unified work of the Church*. It is the expression of her life; it is the response to her vocation as the Body of Christ. Evangelization is likewise the great service that the Church offers to the world. It is her response to the anguish of modern man, to the loneliness of millions of people, to the alienation of whole categories or communities. Yes, the Church proclaims the supreme relevance of God’s saving love manifested in his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. The Church, in fidelity to her own being, offers Jesus Christ as “our wisdom, our righteousness, our sanctification and redemption” (1 Cor. 1, 30): she offers him as the great manifestation of the transcendent God.

5. All your pastoral and missionary efforts take their inspiration from evangelization and it is in the light of this purpose that the work of your *episcopal commissions* must find its orientation.

By the grace of God, the Church in Japan has for years offered dedicated service through Catholic education. In God’s providence this education has been a means of evangelization for many people and has furnished the opportunity for growth in the faith through a systematic catechesis. This apostolate retains all its importance today and must continually be looked at in this perspective.

6. Dear Brothers: the Church is indeed “the People of God immersed in the world and often tempted by idols, and she always needs to hear the proclamation of the ‘mighty works of God’” (PAULI VI *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 15). Hence *she is constantly in need of being evangelised and she must evangelise*. For all these reasons I wish to offer you my support as you summon all your priests, religious and laity to this lofty task in 1987. The unity to which you invite them is the great unity of the Catholic Church, and the co-operation to which they are called includes *cooperation with the whole Body of Christ throughout the world*. In this pastoral endeavour be assured once again of *the love and solidarity of the Successor of Peter and Bishop of Rome*.

7. And, finally, as in any immense project of this nature, it is altogether fitting that we should turn our thoughts to *the Holy Spirit*. All evangelization depends on him; the success of every endeavour is linked to his grace. "Techniques of evangelization are good, but even the most advanced ones could not replace the gentle action of the Spirit" (*Ibid.* 75). In reaffirming this truth of our faith we likewise reaffirm *the whole supernatural nature of the Church* as a community of grace, having its origin in God and being totally dependent on him. And it is in the context of this truth that together we shall face the challenges and problems of the Church in Japan. Meanwhile, as I express my love and affection for your beloved Church and for all your people, as I was able to do four years ago on Japanese soil, I commend you all to the maternal care of Mary, Mother of the Incarnate Word and Mother of his Church.

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