



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS OF THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE
OF MALAYSIA, SINGAPORE AND BRUNEI**

Friday, 6 September 1985

My dear Brothers in Christ,

1. Our celebration of faith and ecclesial communion during your visit to Rome culminates on this day as we gather together as brothers in the episcopal ministry. My words to you echo those of Saint Paul: "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all, making my prayer with joy, thankful for your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now" (*Phil. 1, 3-5*).

Your presence in Rome to pray at the tombs of Saints Peter and Paul manifests your desire to strengthen the bonds of collegial unity which link you to the Successor of Peter. On my part, I welcome you with fraternal affection in the Lord Jesus, and I wish to let you know of my eagerness to share in your joys and sorrows as ministers of the mysteries of God and *Pastors of the Church in Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei*.

2. Jesus Christ is he "whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption" (*1 Cor. 1, 30*). He took flesh in order to redeem the human race. As the Son of God, he had no other aim than to fulfil the will of the Father: "My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work" (*Io. 4, 34*). Likewise, he willed to make us share in his divine sonship and he enabled us to come to understand the mystery of God's Fatherhood, indeed to cry out: "Abba! Father!" (Cfr. *Rom. 8, 16*).

This grace of divine filiation encourages us to have the same attitude towards his heavenly Father as Jesus himself had: to pledge our whole heart and life to God's service. We serve him not with the heart of slaves but with that of children - sons and daughters who respond to the Lord's call

with dedication, generosity and joy.

At the same time, as children of God we are joined by a bond which has an implication for our relationship with each other. Saint Paul states: "For as many of you as were baptised into Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (*Gal. 3, 17-28*).

Oneness in Christ signifies an equality which surpasses the obvious differences of physical capacity and intellectual and moral powers. We are created in God's image; we have the same nature and origin and, being redeemed by Christ, we enjoy the same divine calling and destiny. Our solidarity as brothers and sisters in the one Lord transcends cultural, racial and ethnic divisions, because Christ has made known to use the mystery of God's will "to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph. 1, 10).

The unity which we share in Christ has universal relevance, but it has particular importance in those circumstances where cultural and ethnic differences may obscure the light of truth proclaimed by Christ and his message of salvation. I wish to offer my *encouragement* to you as Pastors and Teachers for all you have done and continue to do in order to *call the People of God* in your respective Dioceses *to ever greater unity in Christ*.

3. Your efforts at evangelization, at proclaiming the message of Christ "in season and out of season" (Cfr. *2 Tim. 4, 2*), also deserve special commendation. The light of Christ must shine for all to see and its rays of hope must reach the farthest corners of the earth. Hence the work of evangelization is *a constant challenge*, one that is *not foreign to any social or cultural environment*.

*The Church offers to the people of every age the good news of the mystery of salvation and the means of sharing in the life of our Triune God. She does this by implanting herself among those people, taking to herself, insofar as they are good, the abilities, resources and customs of each people, which she in turn purifies, strengthens and ennobles. She establishes relationships of respect and love with them and through a sincere dialogue, deeply pervaded by the Spirit of Christ, she can penetrate those hearts which are not yet marked with the sign of faith and gently lead them to the light of the Gospel (Cfr. *Ad Gentes*, 11).*

*Sterling examples of this realous spirit were the Apostles of the Slavs, Saints Cyril and Methodius, whose work of evangelization I recently commemorated with my Encyclical Epistle, "*Slavorum Apostoli*". In referring to those great missionaries I wrote: "Their generous decision to identify themselves with those people's life and traditions, once having purified and enlightened them by Revelation, make Cyril and Methodius true models for all the missionaries who in every period have accepted Saint Paul's invitation to become all things to all people in order to redeem all" (IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Slavorum Apostoli*, 11).*

In this regard, I am aware that the Bishops of Malaysia are currently studying the methods of introducing the Malay language into the Sacred Liturgy. It is a matter which needs your careful and patient attention.

In this same context I wish to express my *heartfelt gratitude* to all the ministers of the Gospel in your own lands. I am speaking of *the many dedicated missionaries* - and I know the difficulties and challenges they have to face - as well as the *local priests, the men and women religious and the lay catechists* who spend themselves so that the seed of God's word may take root, flourish and grow strong. Their tireless efforts to build up the Kingdom merit our admiration and deep appreciation. Only the Lord can adequately reward them.

4. I also wish to praise your efforts in issuing last year's *Joint Pastoral Letter on the role of the Church in building an ever firmer national identity among your people*. Indeed, the Church, by reason of her unique role and competence, is not identified with any political system. Yet she is at once the sign and the safeguard of the *transcendent dimension of the human person* (Cfr. *Gaudium et Spes*, 76). This sublime role impels her to contribute to the good of each nation by promoting all that will favour the welfare and the personal vocation and destiny of every individual. This she has done in your countries in many ways, especially in the fields of health care, social work and education.

Individual Christians furthermore should strive to be ever conscious of their proper role in the political community and be generous and loyal patriots. They should be examples by their sense of responsibility and their dedication to the common good (Cfr. *Ibid.* 75).

In a special way, the *young people should be encouraged to take an active part in the life and development of their own nation*. I repeat to the youth of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei what I wrote in this year's World Day of Peace Message: "I invite all of you, young people of the world, to take up your responsibility in this greatest of spiritual adventures that a person will face: to build human life, as individuals and in society, with respect for the vocation of man . . . During your whole lifetime, you must affirm and reaffirm the values that favour life, that reflect the dignity and vocation of the human person, that build a world of peace and justice" (IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Nuntius scripto datus ob diem ad pacem fovendam Calendis Ianuariis a. 1985 celebrandum*, 10, die 8 dec. 1985: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, VII, 2, (1984) 1559).

5. My brothers, how much I wish to express my spiritual unity with you and all who collaborate with you in our common partnership in the Gospel! I encourage you to *strive for ever greater unity among yourselves and to be vigilant in preserving unity with the universal Church*. As I recalled in another context: "For full catholicity, every nation, every culture has its own part to play in the universal plan of salvation. Every particular tradition, every local Church must remain open and alert to the other Churches and traditions and, at the same time, to universal and catholic communion; were it to remain closed in on itself, it too would run the risk of becoming

impoverished” (IOANNIS PAULI PP. *Slavorum Apostoli*, 27).

I am very pleased to greet each of you as the heads of your local Churches and I offer my best wishes for the activities of the new President and officers of the Episcopal Conference, especially as you undertake the important task of preparing your Regional Pastoral Handbook. I extend too a special welcome to the Archbishop Emeritus of Kuala Lumpur, Dominic Vendargon, who has joined you on this pilgrimage to Rome. Not physically present among us but very much *in our thoughts and prayers* is Bishop Simon Fung of the Diocese of Kota Kinabalu. His illness, which he has accepted in faith and trust in the Lord’s provident designs, serves to remind us that none of us lives for himself, since “if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s” (*Rom.* 14, 8-9).

I commend Bishop Fung and all of you to the loving protection of the Mother of God, Mary most holy, who watches over the priests, sisters, brothers and laity of your Dioceses with special care. May Jesus her Son sustain you in his grace and love as you go forth to proclaim his message with steadfast hope and abiding joy. To all of you I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.

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