



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC PILGRIMAGE TO INDIA

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
ON OCCASION OF THE PRAYER MEETING
IN THE SUBURB OF SAINT THOMAS**

Trichur (India)

Friday, 7 February 1986

Dear friends,

It is truly a great satisfaction for me to visit Trichur in the course of my apostolic pilgrimage through India.

1. I thank Bishop Kundukulam for his kind words of welcome and I greet all the bishops, priests, men and women religious and faithful present here in such great numbers.

From this place, the headquarters of the Trichur District, I greet the Syro-Malabar Dioceses of the northern part of Kerala: Trichur, Tellicherry, Mananthavady, Palghat and Irinjalakuda; the Syro-Malankara Dioceses of Tiruvalla and Battery; the Latin Archdiocese of Verapoly and the Dioceses of Calicut and Coimbatore.

I thank the representatives of the other Christian Churches for their presence: the Christians of the East, the Syrian Orthodox Christians, the Anjoorians, the Marthomites, and all those who in Saint Thomas the Apostle venerate the founding of Christ's Church in India.

I express my high esteem and consideration for the representatives of all the religious traditions present in his region.

To the civil authorities and to the men and women who represent the various fields of public service, I express my appreciation and goodwill.

May Almighty God, our common Father, our origin and our destiny, bless this gathering and

inspire us with true sentiments of mutual regard and love for all our fellow human beings, for the construction of a more just and peace-loving world!

2. Brothers and sisters in Christ, how true are the words of the Psalmist: "Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brethren dwell in unity" .

When you recited the Creed in your own language, Malayalam, I gave thanks to Almighty God for your profession of faith. The faith in the Risen Lord which, according to tradition, the Apostle Thomas brought to these shores, lives on in your minds and hearts. For this reason, with Saint Paul: "I give thanks to God always for you because of the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus" .

Today, when I lit the lamp in your midst with the torch carried here from Crangannore by your young people, I recalled how, through the preaching of the Apostles, Christ has been made known as the Light of the Nations, the Light of the world. Jesus himself said: "I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" .

Is it not right for me, the successor of Peter, called to the ministry of the service of unity, to give thanks that this light has been shining in this land since the earliest years of Christianity itself? Shall I not praise God that down through the centuries your forefathers have endeavoured to walk in this light and to let it guide their steps? Shall I not pray to God with all of you that this light may shine still and enlighten you today – and your children tomorrow – so that your lives may be filled with the presence of him who "enlightens every man"?

3. Brothers and sisters in Christ, today the Lord is calling you to cherish the faith and to profess openly the commitment to the Lord which you and your ancestors have made. Today, Christ, the Light of the world, is calling you to allow that light to shine ever more clearly through the testimony of your lives and the good works by which you witness to the authenticity of your Christian life. For light is not light unless it shines and lights up the world about it.

You are called then to let this light brighten your hearts and your homes. May this be so fully accomplished that you may truly be "children of the light", walking always in the light.

Only then will the light of Christ shine on all that you do and on all those who come into contact with you: your neighbourhood, your world of work, of study, of art, of committed service to the national and local communities. This will also be indicated symbolically in the foundation stones and memorial slabs that I am about to bless.

4. Christ, the Light of the Nations, is in a special way the light of every Christian family, of every Christian home. We have been reminded of this in the suggestive gesture of the newly married couples who have renewed here their marriage promises. We have been witnesses of the pledge

they have taken: "to live from this moment to death with mutual love, mutual trust and united mind".

We who have witnessed their pledge are called upon to offer the support of our prayers for its fulfilment. I assure them and all the families of Kerala and of India that they have a particular place in my prayers.

The healthy condition of family life is essential to the well-being of individuals and of society . I am aware that family life in India has traditionally enjoyed the highest esteem and care. Yet today the family is often beset by difficulties of various kinds. People sensitive to the true needs of society will certainly indicate the safeguarding of marriage and family life as requiring urgent attention.

This is a grave concern of all religious traditions and of all sectors of civil society. In this respect the Holy See has published a "Charter of the Rights of the Family", addressed to governments, international organisations, to families themselves and to all who are concerned with the good of the family. The rights of families enunciated in the Charter are based on the common values of all humanity. It is the Holy See's ardent hope that this document may serve as a point of reference in a world-wide effort to uphold and strengthen the family as the fundamental cell of society and the primary environment for the personal and social development of individuals.

5. I draw your attention to one of the various principles expressed in the preamble of the Charter: "the family constitutes, much more than a juridical, social and economic unit, a community of love and solidarity, which is uniquely suited to teach and transmit cultural, ethical, social, spiritual and religious values, essential for the development and well-being of its own members and of society".

Family life in Kerala and in India has been and continually strives to be just such a community of love and solidarity, and I encourage you to defend and promote the institution of the family.

In particular, Christian families are called to establish their identity and role upon God's will for family life. In essence "the family has the mission to guard, reveal and communicate love, and this is a living reflection of and a real sharing in God's love for humanity and the love of Christ the Lord for the Church his bride" .

Christian families of Kerala, do not forget that your homes are the ideal place for experiencing God's love and making it known! I was pleased to learn that among the Saint Thomas Christians there existed a tradition of whispering the name of Jesus in the ears of a new-born baby, together with its own name.

Is it not necessary to continue such traditions today when a truly Christian formation of the young is more urgent than ever? Are not such traditions the genuine expression of the spiritual and human values on which your Christian families are built? Is it not a magnificent form of parental

love for you to transmit to your children from their earliest years a deep love of our Lord Jesus Christ, to teach them how to pray, to teach them the truths of the catechism, to introduce them into the life of the Church?

May your families be blessed with unity, love and mutual support!

6. To the young people I wish to say: love your families and your country. Love the Church and share ever more fully in her life.

Some of you have carried the torch of light from Crangannore and a picture of Saint Thomas from Palayur. The Pope invites the young people of Kerala and of India to see in this symbol the need, your responsibility, to offer light, brotherhood, hope and solidarity to your contemporaries and to all those who search for the truth. You aspire to a better world. A more just, more peaceful, more humane world is possible – but it must be constructed step by step. In this process, your ideals, your energies, your faith are needed. Let Christ be your light!

7. The Diocese of Trichur, in co-operation with the Government's housing scheme for the poor, is donating a large number of houses to people in need. You have expressed the wish that I should hand over the key of one of the houses as a token of what is being done and of what still remains to be done. Here is a sign of development, the result, of praiseworthy collaboration for the benefit of society as a whole.

This particular gesture underlines the connection between socio-economic realities and the promotion of the dignity and total vocation of the human person . For individuals and families effectively to enjoy the degree of stability and freedom necessary for personal growth, certain minimum standards of living and working are absolutely required. There is an increasing awareness in the world that progress is not the exclusive right of some privileged individuals or even nations, but that the benefits of development should extend to all. In a world of great inequalities, where patterns of thought and behaviour change ever so slowly, it is imperative that all sectors of society feel duty-bound to hasten the achievement of that measure of social justice which consists in ensuring the basic necessities of life for every citizen. The efforts of governments and other agencies in this field are to be encouraged.

The role of religious bodies in this matter is above all to enlighten consciences regarding social rights and duties, and to ensure that human dignity and the spiritual nature of human life and activity are everywhere recognised and promoted. This is the work of justice which we must carry out under the inspiration of charity .

8. Dear people of Trichur, and friends from all parts of Kerala: Christ, the Light of the Nations, came into this world through his Immaculate Virgin Mother, Mary. I know how fervent you are in your devotion to her. I wish to encourage you in this.

In connection with the centenary celebrations of the Diocese of Trichur and of its Cathedral, I gladly entrust you to the care and intercession of our Blessed Mother. The statue that I shall crown, which will be kept in the Cathedral Church, will be a reminder of my pilgrimage to you – a reminder that we have prayed together to her whose faith shines from generation to generation as the model of our obedience to God and of our joyful acceptance of his will in our lives. May she watch over you and protect you always!

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