



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS OF THE SYRO-MALANKARA CHURCH
OF INDIA ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Tuesday, 13 May 2003

Your Grace,

Dear Brother Bishops,

1. "*Christo pastorum Principi*". Repeating the words employed by my illustrious predecessor, Pope Pius XI, when he received your forefathers into full communion just over seventy years ago, I am pleased to welcome you, the Bishops of the Syro-Malankara Church, on the occasion of your *ad Limina* visit. In being with you, I draw closer to the priests, Religious and lay faithful of your Eparchies. Indeed, it is fitting that as your community celebrates the Fiftieth Anniversary of the death of Archbishop Mar Ivanios, a tireless apostle for unity, you find yourselves at the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul praying with Christ "*ut omnes unum sint*". I take this opportunity to greet especially Archbishop Cyril Mar Baselios. I am grateful for the good wishes you have conveyed on behalf of the clergy, Religious and faithful of the Syro-Malankara Church.

As we give thanks together for these important landmarks in your ecclesial life, we are also mindful of the multiple blessings that have been bestowed on your Church in a relatively short time. You have become one of the fastest growing Catholic communities in the world, boasting large numbers of vocations to the priesthood and religious life, and your *pusillus grex* is home to many educational and welfare institutions. The new Law of Christ which compels us to go beyond the boundaries of family, race, tribe or nation is concretely manifested in your generosity to others (cf. *Mt 5:44*).

2. An undaunted commitment to Christian love, so clearly demonstrated in the Syro-Malankara community, is the product of a strong and vibrant spirituality. The people of India rightly take pride in their rich cultural and spiritual heritage, expressed in the innate characteristics of

"contemplation, simplicity, harmony, detachment, non-violence, discipline, frugal living, the thirst for learning and philosophical enquiry" which distinguish those living on the subcontinent. These same traits permeate the Syro-Malankara community, allowing the Church to "communicate the Gospel in a way which is faithful both to her own traditions and to the Asian soul" (cf. *Ecclesia in Asia*, 6).

The mystical heritage of your continent is not only expressed in the spiritual life of your faithful but is also seen in your time-honoured rites. The ancient and revered Syro-Malankara liturgical tradition is a treasure which reflects the universal nature of Christ's salvific work in a uniquely Indian context. Your Eucharistic Celebration, like all celebrations of the Paschal Sacrifice, "contains the Church's entire spiritual wealth: Christ himself, our Passover and living bread. Consequently the gaze of the Church is constantly turned to her Lord present in the Sacrament of the Altar, in which she discovers the full manifestation of his boundless love" (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 4).

3. At a moment of growing secularism and, at times, of blatant disregard for the sanctity of human life, Bishops are called to remind the people by their preaching and teaching of the need for an ever deeper reflection on moral and social issues. The Syro-Malankara presence in the fields of education and social services places you in an excellent position to prepare all men and women of good will to face these issues in a truly human manner. In fact, all Christians are obliged to participate in this prophetic mission by taking a firm stand against the current crisis of values and by constantly reminding others of the universal truths which must be manifest in daily living. More often than not, this lesson is taught by actions rather than by words. As the Apostle Paul says: "Make love your aim, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy" (1 Cor 14:1).

Responding to this challenge in a proper fashion necessitates an inculturation of Christian ethics at all levels of human society; this is a difficult and delicate task. "By her very mission the Church travels the same journey as all humanity and shares the same human lot with the world: she is to be leaven, and as it were the soul of human society in its renewal by Christ and transformation into the family of God" (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 854). Your long experience as a small community of Christians in a predominately non-Christian land has prepared you to become this "leaven", a fitting instrument of transformation. The process is never simply an "external" one but requires an intimate change of cultural values through integration into Christianity and subsequent insertion into the various human cultures. This complicated task cannot be accomplished, however, without adequate reflection and evaluation, ensuring always that Christ's saving message is never diluted or altered in an attempt to make it more culturally or socially acceptable (cf. *Ecclesia in Asia*, 21).

4. Your special ministry, as shepherds of growing flocks, requires close collaboration with your co-workers. As I wrote in my Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, "priests exist

and act in order to proclaim the Gospel to the world and to build up the Church in the name of Christ the Head and Shepherd" (No.15). Properly trained ambassadors of Christ are necessary for this ministry of "building up the Church". For this reason Bishops must work unceasingly to identify and encourage young people to answer the call to the priesthood and the religious life. In this regard, I pray that you will continue to do all in your power to ensure that those with priestly or religious vocations are well prepared. This entails ensuring that the seminaries under your protection are always models of formation according to the example of Jesus Christ and his commandment to love (cf. *Jn* 15:12). Training must be specifically Christ-centred through the proclamation of the holy Scriptures and the celebration of the Sacraments.

The same is true of the formation of candidates for consecrated life. "All are to have appropriate formation and training which should be Christ-centred ... with emphasis on personal sanctity and witness; their spirituality and lifestyle should be sensitive to the religious heritage of the people among whom they live and whom they serve" (*Ecclesia in Asia*, 44). As Bishops, you are the source of guidance and strength for the religious communities in your Eparchies. Through close cooperation with religious superiors you must help to guarantee that the training received by candidates transforms their hearts, minds and souls in such a way that they are enabled to give themselves without reservation to the work of the Church. Your strong leadership will do much to encourage religious communities to persevere in their edifying example as witnesses to Christ's joy.

5. Dear Brother Bishops, these are some of the thoughts that your visit evokes. The Solemnity of Easter which we have just celebrated urges you to allow the Risen Lord to renew continually the Churches under your care. Entrusting you to Mary, Queen of the Rosary, I pray that through her intercession the Holy Spirit will indeed fill you with joy and peace, and I impart my Apostolic Blessing to you and to the priests, Religious and faithful of your Eparchies.