



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS OF SRI LANKA
ON THEIR AD LIMINA VISIT**

Saturday, 28 April 1979

Dear Brothers in our Lord Jesus Christ,

AS WE ASSEMBLE in the unity of the Episcopate, our thoughts turn spontaneously to Jesus Christ. We are supremely conscious of the urgency which pervaded his soul, and which he expressed in the words: "I must proclaim the Good News of the kingdom of God... because that is what I was sent to do"^[1].

In reflecting on this mission of Christ, we understand the evangelizing nature of his Church; at the same time we obtain new insights into our own mission as Bishops communicating the word of God.

At the centre of the Good News that we are called to proclaim is the great mystery of Redemption and, especially, the person of the Redeemer. All our efforts as Pastor of the Church are directed to making the Redeemer better known and loved. We find our identity as Bishops in preaching "the unsearchable riches of Christ"^[2], in transmitting his salvific message of revelation.

Absolute fidelity to the special evangelizing task inherent in our episcopal office becomes the aim of our daily lives. The following words of my recent Encyclical apply above all to us Bishops: "We perceive intimately that the truth revealed to us by God imposes on us an obligation. We have, in particular, a great sense of responsibility for this truth. By Christ's institution the Church is its guardian and teacher, having been endowed with a unique assistance of the Holy Spirit in order to guard and teach it in its most exact integrity"^[3].

For this reason, we are intent on maintaining the purity of the Catholic faith; we are vigilant that the content of evangelization corresponds to the message preached by Christ, transmitted by the

Apostles, and authenticated by the Church's Magisterium over the centuries. Day after day we speak to our people about the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the Kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God. We clearly and explicitly proclaim before the entire world that salvation is a gift of God's grace and mercy, and that it is offered to all in Jesus Christ the Son of God, who died and rose from the dead. We preach a transcendent and eschatological salvation begun in time but to be fulfilled only in eternity.

At the same time evangelization involves an explicit message about the rights and duties of every human being. The Gospel message is necessarily linked to human advancement under the aspects of both development and liberation, since it is not possible to proclaim Christ's new commandment of love without promoting in justice and peace the well-being of man.

Our efforts, moreover, to bring this universal message into the lives of each ecclesial community, and to transpose it into language that is readily understood, must be made in close harmony with the whole Church, for we know that to adulterate the content of the Gospel, under the pretext of adapting it, is to dissipate its power. Ours is a grave responsibility, but one that we face with serenity and confidence, convinced as we are, in accordance with the Lord's promise, that the Spirit of truth guides us, provided we remain faithful to the communion of Christ's Church.

It is also significant to note in Paul VI's great treatise on evangelization how forcefully he insists that effective evangelization depends on holiness of life^[4]. The Gospel must be proclaimed by witness, the witness of a Christian life lived in fidelity to the Lord Jesus. And just as all categories of people in the Church are invited to fulfil their role in the task of evangelization, so also everyone is earnestly exhorted to true holiness of life.

In reflecting on evangelization, it is fitting to dwell also on that unity which Jesus came to effect. In transmitting to his disciples the words that his Father gave him, Jesus prayed that they would be truly one^[5]. By his Gospel, Christ overcame the divisions of sin and human weakness, reconciling us to the Father, and leaving us as a legacy his new commandment of love. He was to die in order "to gather in unity the scattered children of God"^[6].

This unity among ourselves and among our peoples is the proof of our discipleship, the gauge of our fidelity to Jesus. The unity to which we are summoned is a unity of faith and love, which supersedes alienation among brethren and overcomes human divisions. The unity enjoyed by Jesus also guarantees the effectiveness of our witness to the world: "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another"^[7].

The same evangelizing Christ who tells us that he must proclaim the Good News also tells us that "the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve"^[8]. Christ thus invites us his members to share his role of kingly service; Christ calls his Church to the service of man. This element I also endeavoured to emphasize in *Redemptor Hominis*: "Inspired by eschatological faith the Church

considers an essential unbreakably united element of her mission this solicitude for man, for his humanity, for the future of men on earth and therefore also for the course set for the whole of development and progress. She finds the principle of this solicitude in Jesus Christ himself, as the Gospel witness"[9].

As an expression of her understanding of the Gospel, the Church mobilizes herself in renewed charity for service to the world. She freely commits herself in all her members to exercise the charity of Christ. And one of the most important services that Christians can render is to love their brethren with the love with which they have been loved: a personal love manifested in understanding, compassion, sensitivity to need, and a desire to communicate the love of Christ's heart. In speaking of the human dimension of the Redemption, I wrote: "Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not participate intimately in it"[10].

Understanding this, we see that there is immense room in the world for the charity of Christ. The service of our love is without limits. We are constantly called to do more, to serve more, to love more.

Dear Brothers, besides these brief reflection on evangelization and service – which care not meant to be complete – there are many other things I would like to talk to you about, in order to encourage you in your pastoral mission, so that you in turn may encourage your priests, religious, seminarians and lay people. But I am sure that in our ecclesial communion itself you will find strength and inspiration to pursue your ministry, building up, through the power of the Holy Spirit, the communities of the faithful entrusted to your pastoral care.

I commend you to the intercession of Mary, the Immaculate Virgin Mother of God, asking her to sustain you in fidelity and joy. I send my Apostolic Blessing with you to your people, into the churches and into the homes of Sri Lanka – "the Pearl of the Indian Ocean" – to the old and to young, to all in suffering and in need. My love is with you all in Jesus Christ and in his Gospel.

[1] *Lk* 4:43.

[2] *Eph* 3:8.

[3] *Redemptor Hominis*, 12.

[4] Cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 21, 26, 41, 76.

[5] Cf. *Jn* 17:8, 11.

[6] *Jn* 11:52.

[7] *Jn* 13:35.

[8] *Mt* 20:28.

[9] No. 15.

[10] *Redemptor Hominis*, 10.

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