



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE BISHOPS FROM INDIA

ON THEIR AD LIMINA VISIT Thursday, 31 May 1979 Dear Brothers in our Lord Jesus Christ, FOR THE THIRD TIME in a little over a month it is my joy to be with a group of Indian Bishops making their *ad limina* visit. As I recall my meetings with your brother Bishops, I offer to you also, for your encouragement and strength, the reflections I made previously with them. I spoke about the ministry of faith which is ours, which rests on the power of God, and which is eminently expressed in the Eucharistic Sacrifice and in the Sacrament of Penance. I subsequently spoke about the holy name of Jesus, source of our strength and joyful inspiration for all our pastoral activities. And today I would like to continue to reflect with you on our common ministry of faith, exercised in the name of Jesus Christ the Son of God and Saviour of the world. Day after day we are conscious of the challenge of Christ's words, spoken before the Ascension: "Go out to the whole world. Proclaim the Good News to all creation"^[1]. As Bishops with this mandate we know what it means to experience limitations, to meet opposition, to face injustice, and to feel the effects of sin. And still we are filled with hope in our work, accepting as we do the words of God: *virtus in infirmitate perficitur*^[2]. This, dear Brothers, was likewise the conviction of all the Bishops of the world as they began the Second Vatican Council. In their Opening Message they stated: "To be sure, we are lacking in human resources and earthly power. Yet we place our trust in the power of God's Spirit, who was promised to the Church by our Lord Jesus Christ"^[3]. This then must be our attitude always, but especially today, as we wait, in the unity of apostolic fellowship, together with Mary the Mother of Jesus, to receive anew at Pentecost the Father's gift of the Spirit, so that we can go forth to give witness to Jesus and to continue among our people his role as the Good Shepherd. Only last Sunday I had the joy of ordaining twenty-six new Bishops, including the Auxiliary of Calcutta. I could not help but reflect on the profound meaning of the ordination rite as I examined the candidates and asked: "Are you resolved as devoted fathers to sustain the people of God and to guide them in the way of salvation in cooperation with the priests and deacons who share your ministry?". These are indeed two key words: to sustain and to guide. Our pastoral ministry exercised in close union with our collaborators is above all directed to the good of God's people, of which our beloved laity are the great majority. For them we give our lives as devoted fathers to sustain them and to guide them in the way of salvation. And Paul VI completes our insight into the reality of his spiritual fatherhood of ours when he writes in *Ecclesiam Suam*. "In the very act of trying to make ourselves pastors, fathers and teachers of men, we must make ourselves their brothers". And so, in the brotherhood that we must also endeavour to exemplify, Jesus Christ is indeed our supreme exemplar – he who is the only begotten Son of God, but who became and is so rightly called "the first-born among many brethren". In this time of Pentecost let us sustain our people, transmitting to them the encouragement of Jesus himself: "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom". In particular, let us do this by spelling out the exalted dignity of the laity within the community of the Church. Of primary importance in this regard is the fact that by Baptism and Confirmation the laity are

commissioned by the Lord himself to share in the saving mission of the Church. It is therefore no pragmatic reason that motivates us to sustain and guide them in their apostolate, but the very will of Christ for his people, for his Church. In so many circumstances the laity are the immediate heralds of faith giving authentic witness to God's Kingdom, which is yet to be revealed in its fulness. It is up to the laity to order temporal affairs in justice and peace, in equity and freedom, in truth and love – in accordance with the divine plan of creation and redemption. After the fashion of leaven, they are called to work for the sanctification of the world for the sanctification of the world from within, beginning with their own families. And all their efforts and struggles and sufferings on behalf of the Kingdom of God are of immense value when united with the Sacrifice of Christ. In the example of the laity the world must see the love of Christ manifested in his members. The nature of the Church as a community of prayers is readily perceived from the assemblies of the faithful gathered for the worship and praise of God. In the community of the faithful – which must always maintain Catholic unity with the Bishops and the Apostolic See – there are great insights of faith. The Holy Spirit is active in enlightening the minds of the faithful with his truth, and in inflaming their hearts with his love. But these insights of faith and this *sensus fidelium* are not independent of the magisterium of the Church, which is an instrument of the same Holy Spirit and is assisted by him. It is only when the faithful have been nourished by the word of God, faithfully transmitted in its purity and integrity, that their own charisms are fully operative and fruitful. Once the word of God is faithfully proclaimed to the community and is accepted it brings forth fruits of justice and holiness of life in abundance. But the dynamism of the community in understanding and living the word of God depends on its receiving intact the *depositum fidei*; and for this precise purpose a special apostolic and pastoral charism has been given to the Church. It is one and the same Spirit of truth who directs the hearts of the faithful and who guarantees the magisterium of the pastors of the flock. One of the greatest services then that we can give to our people is to proclaim to them, day in and day out, “the unsearchable riches of Christ”, pointing out that Christianity is a unique and original message of salvation to be found in the name of Jesus Christ and in his name alone. Brethren, each one of us must repeatedly confirm the yes of our episcopal ordination: we must indeed be resolved to sustain the people of God and to guide them in the way of salvation. And as we strive to fulfil this charge we must think of Jesus, who transmits to his disciples the great treasure of the Father's word: *Ego dedi eis sermonem tuum*. We are called to continue his revelation of the Father, to transmit the word of God. As we exhort our people more and more to indiscriminating service of their brethren and to universal love, we wish them to realize the great dignity that is theirs as disciples of Christ, and the real consequences of this discipleship in their daily living. With humility, but with deep conviction, we must take our stand, clearly passing on the exhortation of Saint Paul: “Do not be conformed to this world”. All of this, Brethren, goes to describe the challenge that faces our laity, who must courageously take their place in loving union with their Bishops in the *pusillus grex*; all of this clarifies the goals of the seminary training that we must uphold; all of this emphasizes the priestly task of true evangelization and gives us deeper insights into our own pastoral ministry as Bishops of the Church of God. Dear Brothers, let us go forward – forward together with each other and with our clergy – in the name of Jesus: strong in our communion of faith and love, serene in the face of obstacles, constant in prayer with Mary and to Mary – and, as fathers and brothers, sustaining our people in their distinctive vocation of Christianity, and guiding them in the way of salvation. And together with the whole Church, let us await the Holy Spirit, who alone can supply for our weaknesses and bring to completion and perfection the ministry of faith that we exercise in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory and honour, for ever and ever.

Amen.

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