



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II  
TO THE INDIAN BISHOPS  
OF THE SYRO-MALABAR AND SYRO-MALANKARA CHURCHES  
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

*Thursday, 18 January 1996*

*Your Eminence,  
Dear Brother Bishops,*

1. At the conclusion of your "*ad Limina*" visit, I wish to assure you again of the heartfelt affection and fraternal esteem in which I hold the venerable Oriental Catholic Churches present in India, *the Syro-Malabar Church and the Syro-Malankara Church*. Your common origins go back to the very beginnings of Christianity, to the preaching of the glorious Apostle Thomas. Today, the dynamic nature of your communities bears witness to the continual presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of each particular Church founded on and sustained by the apostolic tradition. "We are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren loved by the Lord, because God chose you from the beginning to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth" (2 *Thess.* 2, 13). With affection in the Lord I congratulate Cardinal Antony Padiyara, the Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church, who in December celebrated the 50th anniversary of his ordination to the priesthood.

I extend a special welcome to Cyril Mar Baselios, recently appointed Metropolitan Archbishop of Trivandrum of the Syro-Malankara Church. In your person *I greet the whole Syro-Malankara Church*, which so effectively blends fidelity to its Oriental tradition with a vigorous commitment to the apostolate. Present in our thoughts at this happy moment are the figures of two unforgettable Pastors, Mar Ivanios, who led you on the path of rediscovered full communion with the See of Peter, and Mar Gregorios, who so wisely directed the development of your Church. I am confident that you will follow in their footsteps, guiding your Church "*fortiter et suaviter*".

2. In his wisdom the Lord has granted to your Churches many signs of his benevolence. Among these we must count the abundant *vocations to the priesthood and religious life* which he continues to raise up in your families and communities. This gift constitutes a fundamental challenge and responsibility for you as Pastors. It calls for judicious selection of candidates, careful attention to their training, in harmony with your oriental tradition and in accordance with the guidelines issued in recent years by the competent Congregations of the Holy See. Priestly formation should be a precious time of prayer in a peaceful atmosphere of study, reflection and fraternal charity. In such surroundings a vocation flourishes and progresses daily in freedom marked by complete self-giving in response to God's constant fidelity. I exhort you to *guard these vocations with great care*, never allowing conflicts within a community to affect the integrity of the formation process. I appreciate the fact that an important point has been reached in the Syro-Malabar Synod, which has just taken place, namely, agreement on the need to give special care, solemnity and completeness to the liturgy in your seminaries, with a view to the homogeneous and consistent formation of the clergy.

3. I have followed with keen interest the work of the Synod of the Syro-Malabar Church. You have examined the Synod procedure it-self and the all-important question of the nature of communion among its members. An enhanced understanding of the "organic" nature of hierarchical communion, which demands a juridical form and is simultaneously animated by charity (Cfr. *Lumen Gentium*, Nota Praevia), is the proper context in which to address the difficulties which present themselves along the path of your Church's growth and development.

There is one result of your Synod which I have noted with particular joy and for which I give you my full support: the unanimous agreement of all the Bishops regarding the steps to be taken by all in order to foster greater unity in conceiving and celebrating the liturgy. I am grateful to you for the efforts you have made in order to reach this point, and I encourage you to do everything necessary to make this agreement a reality in all your Eparchies.

4. You have also reached further consensus regarding missionary activity and the pastoral care of the faithful in other parts of India and elsewhere in the world. My Letter to the Bishops of India of 28 May 1987 had already given certain indications in this regard. At that time, the dicasteries involved worked with common accord, and concrete results were achieved. It is now necessary to continue that work, in constant dialogue with the Latin-rite Bishops of India. Great openness and mutual understanding are required on the part of all concerned, in the knowledge that the salvation of souls — *salus animarum* — is the supreme law of pastoral action.

5. Today marks the beginning of this year's Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Your Churches themselves are living proof of the fact that "legitimate diversity is in no way opposed to the Church's unity, but rather enhances her splendour and contributes greatly to the fulfilment of her mission" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Ut Unum Sint*, 50). I encourage you to persevere in the dialogue of love and the theological dialogue with your brethren not in full communion with us. In the end, the

unity of all Christ's followers is a grace which we must ardently pray for and which we must strive to merit through humble and generous fidelity to the Gospel.

6. During your "*ad Limina*" visit you have made present, at the tombs of the Princes of the Apostles, Peter and Paul, and to the heart of the Successor of Peter, the achievements, the hopes and the generous commitment of the priests, religious and lay faithful of the *Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankara Churches*. As you return to your Eparchies and seek, through the generous fulfilment of your spiritual and pastoral mission, to strengthen the Christian life of your communities, I exhort you to put all your trust in the Lord: "Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labour in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain"(Ps. 127 (126), 1). Let us never forget that the Holy Spirit is the principal architect of the Church's life amid the vicissitudes of history and the events of every day. Perhaps it is not superfluous to recall that the solution of many problems affecting the Church in every time and place lies in *listening intently to the voice of the Holy Spirit* as he guides us to the whole truth (Cfr. *Io.* 16, 13). He makes known that truth to the simple of heart, whose eyes of faith see that which remains hidden to the "wise and understanding" (Cfr. *Matth.* 11, 25).

May the intercession of Mary, Mother of the Church, strengthen you and all the faithful for the important work that still lies before you. May the Lord sustain you "in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (*Rom* 15, 5-6).

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