



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

HOMILY

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Distinguished Guests, dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, like all of you, I have been deeply saddened these days by seeing all the great suffering of the people of the eastern coastal region caused by the recent cyclone. As a guest of India I wish to assure everyone of my prayers for the victims, for those who are now struggling to overcome very difficult circumstances. I renew the appeal I have already made to the international community to give prompt and practical assistance to alleviate such suffering. Your Eminences,

My Brother Bishops,

Distinguished Guests,

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*¹ “Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come . . . from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead” (Rev 1:4-5). To the Father of endless mercies I give all thanks and praise that I am once again on the blessed soil of Asia. I rejoice with you in the communion which transcends all time and joins in love Christians of “every tribe and tongue and people and nation” (Rev 5:9). As a pilgrim, I pay homage to the continent which is the cradle of great religious traditions and ancient civilizations. How can we not be moved by Asia’s ceaseless passion for the Absolute, for what is beyond our earthly vision? In the peace of the Risen Lord, we meet on Asian soil to seal the fruits of the Synod which we celebrated in Rome close to the Tomb of the Apostle Peter. I thank Archbishop de Lastic, the Indian Bishops, and the civil authorities for all that they have done to make this visit possible. I hail the many priests, religious women and men and lay faithful throughout Asia who spend their lives for Christ and the Gospel. I am grateful to the representatives of the Christian Churches and ecclesial communities who grace this gathering with their presence, and my thoughts turn too to the followers of other religions who look to this meeting with interest and respect. Peace be upon you all!² The Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops surveyed the situation of the Church in Asia and of the entire Asian continent in the perspective of the Lord’s command to preach the Gospel to all nations. We did so, conscious that the world advances towards ever new possibilities of development and that Christians have special responsibilities as we enter the Third Christian Millennium. Together, we sought to read the signs of the times with the eyes of faith and the hearts of Pastors. This involved sharing “the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 1) of all Christ’s followers on this continent. The Synod was not only a profound experience of brotherhood in the episcopal ministry, but above all a powerful encounter with Jesus Christ who takes to himself the joys and sorrows of the world. Listening with heart and mind, the Synod Fathers heard the peoples of Asia cry out in a host of tongues: “Which is the door that leads to life?” And we heard Jesus say: “I am the door”. Yes,

Jesus Christ is the door that leads to life! We heard Asians cry out: "Who will open the door for us?" And there came the reply of Christ: "I will open the door and lead you into life". We heard the voice of Asia's peoples ask: "But how will you open the door and lead us into life?" To this Jesus replied: "I will lay down my life for you!" Then Asia asked: "But how will you lay down your life for us?" And the reply of Jesus involves us all: "I have already done so on Calvary, and I continue to give myself for you in my mystical Body, the Church, and in my sacramental Body, the Eucharist, offered for the salvation of the world!" The Synod was an ardent affirmation of faith in Jesus Christ the Saviour; and it remains a call to conversion, so that the Church in Asia might become ever more worthy of the graces continually being offered by God (cf. *Ecclesia in Asia*, 4).³ Most of the Churches of Asia are comparatively small in number, but they have shown themselves great in fidelity to Christ and to the Gospel, even in times of persecution. They are Churches that have known the shedding of blood, and the host of Asian martyrs is surely their greatest glory. Te martyrum candidatus laudat exercitus. Christians like Saint Andrew Kim Tae-gon, Saint Paul Miki, Saint Lorenzo Ruiz and Saint Andrew Dung-Lac, and countless other holy men and women on this continent show us how fully the grace of Christ can penetrate the hearts of Asian peoples. From such unforgettable witness, the Churches of Asia learn the way of love and loving service, and they learn that an eminent fruit of love is justice. It is surely the work of the Holy Spirit that Asian Christians are turning more and more to the defence of human dignity and the pursuit of justice. This service of the human person is grounded not in the illusions of ideologies but in respect for the creative act of God who made man and woman in his own image (cf. *Gen* 1:26). Christians expend immense energies in practical charity, and in human promotion and liberation, in obedience to the Lord's command that we love one another as he has loved us (cf. *Jn* 13:34).⁴ In some cases, Asian Christians dwell in lands scarred by conflicts, which are at times presented as the effect of religion. What a travesty of true belief this is! How unfaithful not only to the Gospel but also to the great insights of the religions of Asia, which in their different ways teach tolerance and goodness. People of all religions must emphatically show that religion and peace go together! But let there also be peace for religion. Let the right to freedom of belief and worship be respected in every part of this continent! For if this most basic of rights is denied, then the whole edifice of human dignity and freedom is shaken. *Ecclesia in Asia* clearly notes that in parts of Asia explicit proclamation is forbidden and religious freedom is denied or systematically restricted (No. 23). In such situations the Church bears witness through a 'taking up of her cross', all the while urging governments to recognize religious freedom as a fundamental human right.⁵ Since Asia suffers greatly from the wound of division between Christians, the Synod urges all Christ's followers to work ever harder to be "of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind" (*Phil* 2:2). It likewise asks the whole Church in Asia to pour herself out in the colloquium salutis, the saving dialogue which reaches out to the followers of other religions and to all men and women of good will. In this dialogue, the word which we must speak is the word of the Cross of Jesus Christ. For in him who emptied himself completely on the Cross the fullness of life is found (cf. *Phil* 2:6-11). The Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* invites the peoples of Asia to contemplate the figure of the crucified Jesus, who leads us through darkness to the door that opens on to the fullness of life which humanity seeks. With a special passion, Asia has always sought that fullness. We speak of a life which comes to us, not when the world's pain is averted or left behind, but when it is entered and transfigured by the power of self-emptying love, the love which is most clearly symbolized in the pierced heart of the Saviour on the Cross. This is the love which makes Christian holiness possible. It gives rise to proclamation, to loving solidarity with those in need, to respect for and openness to every human being and to all peoples. Let no one fear the Church! Her one ambition is to continue Christ's mission of service and love, so that the light of Christ may shine more brightly, and the life that he gives may be more accessible to those who hear his call.⁶ In presenting the fruit of the Synod's work in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, you, the Bishops, are being asked to make ever greater efforts to spread the Gospel of salvation throughout the length and

breadth of the human geography of Asia. The question is not whether the Church has something essential to say to the men and women of our time, but how she can say it clearly and convincingly! (Cf. No. 29). The Good Shepherd laid down his life for the sheep, and we who bear his name must follow that same path. With Saint Gregory of Nyssa we must pray for the strength to fulfil the ministry entrusted to us: "Show me, Good Shepherd, where green pastures and restful waters lie; call me by my name, that I may hear your voice" (*Commentary on the Song of Songs*, 2). Successors of the Apostles, responsible for the Body of Christ, shepherd the Church in Asia with loving care, through every dark valley to green pastures and restful waters. May Mary, "dawn of the mystical day" (Akathistos, Stanza 5), gather you to herself, that you may be strengthened for the work ahead. Through her intercession, may the Holy Church find strength to continue to the end the mission entrusted to her by the Lord. "To him who loves us . . . to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen" (*Rev* 1:5- 6).