



The Holy See

***LETTER OF THE HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS OF THE SYNOD
OF THE SYRO-MALABAR CHURCH***

To my Venerable Brother Bishops of the Synod of the Syro-Malabar Church

It is a great joy for me to address you, dear Brother Bishops of the Syro-Malabar Church, with whom I am united in the ministry of the Successors of the Apostles and by reason of the particular esteem and affection in which I hold your Church, rich in its historical memory, young in its enthusiasm for announcing the Gospel, alive in its commitment to witness to the Christian life. In a special way, as you began and continue to progress as a Major Archiepiscopal Church, and fulfilling the responsibility which is proper to me, I have been close to you in your journey together towards a deeper communion, based on a fuller participation in your specific ecclesial tradition.

From 1992, the year of the elevation of your Church to this status, I have followed closely all that you have successfully done to set up the necessary juridical and pastoral structures. I have recognized your commitment to build together that unity in communion which would be the most explicit witness of your faith in Jesus Christ. A good part of the journey has been completed, although more remains to be done in order that your light, set on a mountain, may shine before the eyes of the world and all may draw from it inspiration and guidance.

In the Acts of the Apostles, Saint Luke describes for us the attitude of the first Christian community: they were unanimous in listening to the teaching of the Apostles, in fraternal communion, in the breaking of bread and in prayer (cf. Acts 2:42). This is the model for every Christian community. To you, as Successors of the Apostles, belongs the task of leading the Syro-Malabar Church towards the full realization of this aspiration.

To make real this communion in fidelity to the apostolic teaching, as seen in the passage of Scripture just mentioned, means that we, as Bishops, must be fully conscious that we are the

guardians of a heritage of faith and grace which precedes and accompanies us, and which we are called to hand on, enriched, to future generations. This patrimony goes far beyond personal opinions and desires, and calls for a shared responsibility for the common good of the Church and for the safeguarding of its tradition in its wholeness and completeness. The awareness of this vocation implies a maximum effort to express the entire truth, in order that nothing, not even the slightest element, may be lost. If you have this duty in relation to the people of God entrusted to you, it is a duty which you fulfil in particular by working together as members of the Synod, that is as Bishops who exercise together their authority as a College.

The "breaking of the bread", the Eucharist, is the highest symbol of this vocation and the source of the strength you need to carry out this task. You have to break the Eucharistic Bread in your communities. But in order for this to be a truthful and consistent action, you must break among yourselves the bread of charity; break it in order to build greater unity, a unity which will involve you personally and will bind you in a specific way to Christ the Head in his Mystical Body which is the Church.

I pray that the Lord will grant you to find in the guarding of the deposit of faith, in the Eucharist and in prayer, the joy of full fraternal harmony and the consolation of the Holy Spirit, who heals our wounds and sustains us in the Church's journey towards the Kingdom of Heaven.

With these sentiments, the Successors of Peter considers that the moment has come to entrust to you, the Bishops of the Syro-Malabar Church, the full exercise of the liturgical faculties provided for by the *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*. This action is intended as an expression of the great confidence which I have in each one of you and in your Synod, through which you work together to serve the truth in charity.

As a result, your responsibility increases; the eyes of all the people of God entrusted to your pastoral care upon you; each decision and commitment will be carefully observed and evaluated. I am confident that the example of your reciprocal love and your wisdom as Pastors will silence all fear. With the strength of the Holy Spirit, open your hearts, in order that no one may feel offended or excluded in the Lord's House. The Risen Christ makes all things new: may this hope sustain you in steadfast faith in the One who is our reconciliation.

With this hope, on this day of confidence and joy for your communities, I invoke upon all of you, and upon the entire Syro-Malabar Church, the blessing of the Lord.

From the Vatican, 14 March 1998

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