



# The Holy See

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## **ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE BISHOPS OF INDIA ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

*Monday, 26 April 1979* Dear Brothers in our Lord Jesus Christ, FOR ALL OF US, this is an hour of faith. We have come together as Bishops of the Church of God, united in Christ, united in a wonderful communion of faith and love, united in a mission of evangelization and service to humanity – a mission that originates from a mandate received from the Saviour of the world. This faith of ours is first of all expressed in thanksgiving to God for the marvellous works that he continues to bring about in the lives of the faithful committed to our pastoral care. You have come to reflect with me on what the Holy Spirit is accomplishing today in the local Churches of the Bengal and North Eastern regions of India, and to give praise to the glory of divine grace. This faith is likewise expressed in fraternity – in the fraternity with which we gather together to consider the exigencies of our apostolic ministry. In this brotherhood of faith, we all experience the great joy of being apostles – successors to the original Twelve. Jesus Christ, today and always, is the centre of our interest; he is the meaning of our lives. We also have the consciousness of belonging to the College of Bishops, of being in solidarity with the other members, of enjoying the support throughout the universal Church of all our Brothers in the Episcopate. Above all, we have the supreme consolation of knowing that the Lord Jesus is in our midst: *Ecce ego vobiscum sum*[1]. This is then, indeed, an hour of faith – an opportunity to renew our faith at the tomb of the Apostle Peter, who confessed that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of the living God"[2], and that he alone has "the words of eternal life"[3]. We are here, moreover, to re-dedicate ourselves to our mission of faith, which is to proclaim God's word, to proclaim God's gift of salvation in Jesus Christ. Our awareness, in faith, of the Lord's presence inspires us to pursue our mission with confidence and humble self-assurance. We know that with God's help there is no challenge that cannot be met, no obstacle that cannot be overcome for the Kingdom of God. With Saint John we attest: "This is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith"[4]. The message of faith that we offer freely and without constraint rests not on the wisdom of men but rather on the power of God[5]. The power of God was strikingly manifested in the Paschal Mystery of Jesus of Nazareth; it pervaded the teaching of the Apostles: and it is active in our day. Above all, this power of God is active through the Eucharistic Sacrifice. It is here that we ourselves, together with our priest, must go to find the main source of that pastoral love[6] which enables us to live a life of faith, a life of selfless love modelled on that of the Good Shepherd. In a full and active sharing in the Eucharistic Sacrifice and in the entire liturgical life of the Church all our people find the primary and indispensable source of the true Christian spirit[7]. Here they draw the strength to be able to give to the world the witness of faith, the witness of love. The joyful commitment of service to humanity in need can only be sustained by power derived from the Eucharistic Christ. And it is he who inspires in the hearts of the faithful an ever greater appreciation of the needs of his brethren. The effectiveness of the laity, and in particular of Christian families, to give to the world the

witness of faith and love is conditioned by their spiritual dynamism, which is nowhere more available than in the Eucharist. The youth of your local Churches can only come to full maturity in Christ through the power of the Eucharist. God's gift of priestly and religious vocations is mysteriously related to the reverent participation of God's people in the Eucharist. Brethren, in this hour of faith that we are celebrating together, it is fitting that we should concentrate on the Eucharist, which is the very mystery of faith. The Eucharist is our source of hope for the future. The success of our ministry is linked to it; the wellbeing of God's people depends on it. With the Second Vatican Council we must continually point out that the Eucharist is "the source and summit of all Christian life"[8]. It is the heart of our ecclesial communities. To re-dedicate ourselves to our ministry of faith as Bishops requires a clear vision of our service in the perspective of Eucharist. The full expression of human concern and love will be effected only through the Eucharist. All the great issues of your pastoral ministry are related to the Eucharistic Christ. He, and he alone, directs, through the power of his presence and the dynamism of his salvific action, the inner life of the ecclesial communities committed to your pastoral care. This profound truth motivated the appeal which I made to the universal Church in my recent Encyclical and which I repeat today: "Every member of the Church, especially Bishops and Priests, must be vigilant in seeing that this sacrament of love shall be at the centre of the life of the People of God..."[9]. In the same Encyclical I spoke also about the close link between the Eucharist and Penance, emphasizing how personal conversion must constantly be pursued with renewed endeavour so that partaking in the Eucharist may not lack its full redeeming effectiveness. In particular, I noted the need to guard the Sacrament of Penance, and I stressed that the faithful observance of the centuries-old "practice of individual confession with a personal act of sorrow and the intention to amend and make satisfaction" is an expression of the Church's defence of "man's right to a more personal encounter with crucified forgiving Christ", and of Christ's "right to meet each one of us in that key moment... of conversion and forgiveness"[10]. Brethren, let us never grow tired of extolling the value of individual confession. The documents that I cited in [Redemptor Hominis](#) make reference to a point of capital importance: "the solemn teaching of the Council of Trent concerning the divine precept of individual confession"[11]. Seen in this perspective, the diligent observance by all the priests of the Church of the *Pastoral Norms of Sacramentum Paenitentiae* in regard to general absolution is both a question of loving fidelity to Jesus Christ and to his redemptive plan, and the expression of ecclesial communion in what Paul VI called "a master of special concern to the universal Church and of regulation by her supreme authority"[12]. Of particular importance for all the Bishops of the world is Paul VI's great pastoral appeal: "Moreover, we ask you, the Bishops, to help your priests to have an ever greater appreciation of this splendid ministry of theirs as confessors"[13]. The experience of centuries confirms the importance of this ministry. And if priests deeply understand how closely they collaborate, through the Sacrament of Penance, with the Saviour in the work of conversion, they will give themselves with ever greater zeal to this ministry... Other works, for lack of time, may have to be postponed or even abandoned, but not the confessional"[14]. Our ministry is indeed a ministry of faith, and the supernatural means to effect our goal are commensurate with the wisdom and power of God. The Eucharist and Penance are great treasures of Christ's Church. In all challenges and joys our ministry, in all our hopes and disappointments, in all the difficulties inherent in proclaiming Christ and his uplifting message for the cause of man and human dignity, let us reflect, in faith, that Christ's power, and not our own, guides our steps and supports our efforts. Today in the fraternity of collegiality that is ours we can hear Christ speaking to us: *Ecce ego vobiscum sum*. And when you return to your people, endeavour to communicate the same message of faith, confidence and strength to the whole community – to the priests, religious and laity who make up with you the People of God: *Ecce ego vobiscum sum*. Particular in the Eucharist. But before we part, before you return to the field of your apostolic labours, let us rekindle, dear Brothers, the gift of God that is ours as Bishops. In the words of Saint Paul: "God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and self-control"[15]. In this way, then, go forth to exercise your

ministry of faith. I ask you to take my greeting to your local Churches: to convey my love for all your people, to express my special gratitude to your co-workers in the priesthood, to the religious and to all who are your partners in the Gospel. My particular encouragement goes to the teachers and the catechists. In the unity of faith, in the love of the Redeemer, I embrace you all, saying with the Apostle Peter: "Peace to all of you who are in

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Christ"[16].

[1] *Mt 28 :20*. [2] *Mt 16 :16*. [3] *Jn 6 :68*. [4] *1 Jn 5 :4*. [5] Cf. *1 Cor 2 :5*. [6] Cf. *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 14. [7] Cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 14. [8] *Lumen Gentium*, 11. [9] *Redemptor Hominis*, 20. [10] *Ibid.* [11] Cf. note 179; "*Ad limina*" Address of Paul VI: 20 April 1978. [12] *Ibid.* [13] Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 30. [14] *Ibid.* [15] *2 Tim 1 :7*. [16] *1 Pt 5 :14*. ©

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