



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO PAKISTAN, PHILIPPINES I, GUAM (UNITED STATES OF AMERICA II), JAPAN, ANCHORAGE (UNITED STATES OF AMERICA II)
(FEBRUARY 16-27, 1981)

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II TO THE CHINESE CATHOLIC COMMUNITIES IN ASIA

Manila

Wednesday, 18 February 1981

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

1. I find it very significant and important to have the opportunity to say a brief word to Chinese Christians during my pastoral visit to Asia. I greet in a particular way Archbishop Matthew Kia and the other Bishops accompanying him, who have honored me with their presence during my pastoral visit to the Philippines. Most sincerely I thank you for coming as the representatives of the Christians of Overseas Chinese Communities to meet me here in Manila.

Some of you have lived for generations in the Philippines or in other Asian countries ; others have come here more recently. I know that it is your desire to be fully integrated into the life of the country where you live, and to contribute by your work, as good citizens, to the prosperity of the nation that is now your home. At the same time you wish to remain united in spirit with your relatives and friends in China. You wish to preserve the traditional Chinese moral values and culture that link you to your families' country of origin, the country you will always love dearly and to the progress of which you are willing to offer all the help desired.

You are also members of the local church communities. These strengthen your commitment to Christ, and imbue you with the same Christian spirit that has been, in the past, the hallmark of the Chinese Christian communities in various countries of the world. Famous people in Chinese history have encountered Christ and have become Christians through the contact they had with

those fervent and dynamic communities. If you maintain that spirit, if you live inspired by the Christian faith and strengthened by the specifically Chinese moral traditions, you will in a profound way be truly Christian and truly Chinese, and contribute to the richness of the whole Church.

Through you who are present here, I now wish to reach out to all who are in China and to greet, with joy and affection, all my brothers and sisters in Christ who live in that vast land.

2. I, John Paul II, Bishop of Rome and Successor of Peter, greet you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, my dear brothers and sisters in China. On my first pastoral visit to Asia I shall meet with the Bishops, clergy, religious and laity of the Church in the Philippines and in Japan, in order to speak to them about the merciful love of God, to proclaim the name of Jesus, "for there is no other name under heaven given by which we must be saved"^[1], and to encourage them to witness to the Gospel. Travelling so close to the borders of your country, I also wanted to speak to you, for across the distances that separate us we are all united "in the name of the Lord Jesus"^[2].

Ever since God's providence in its mysterious ways called me from my native Poland to the See of Peter in Rome, I have ardently desired to express my affection and esteem to all my brothers and sisters of the Church in China, and to praise the Lord for the great things that he has wrought in the hearts of those who profess his name in the cities and villages of your immense land.

The Spirit of the Lord is at work in all peoples and nations, and to this Spirit I have wanted to bear witness by making it the special goal of my pilgrimage to Asia to honour the Martyrs of Nagasaki. Through them I pay homage to all the men and women in Asia who have offered up their lives for the name of Jesus, giving proof thereby that the Gospel of Christ and his Church are not alien to any people or any nation but that they live in the hearts and in the minds of the people of all races and nations around the world.

And so, in greeting you, I make my own the words of the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Church in Rome : "First I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you and for the way in which your faith is spoken of all over the world ... I am longing to see you either to strengthen you by sharing a spiritual gift with you, or what is better, to find encouragement among you from our common faith"^[3].

3. Through my humble words, I also want to express my esteem for your great country. Your country is great indeed, not only in terms of geographical extension and population, but especially because of its history, the wealth of its culture, and the moral values that the people have cultivated all through the ages. The Jesuit, Father Matteo Ricci, understood and appreciated Chinese culture fully from the beginning, and his example should serve as an inspiration to many. Others, at times, did not show the same understanding. But whatever difficulties there may have been, they belong to the past, and now *it is the future that we have to look to*.

Your country is indeed devoting all its energies to the future. It wishes to ensure, through scientific and technological development, and through the industrious collaboration of all its people, that its citizens can live in true happiness. I am convinced that every Catholic within your frontiers will fully contribute to the building up of China, since a genuine and faithful Christian is also a genuine and good citizen. A Christian—in any country of the world—is faithful to God, but he also has a deep sense of duty and of love towards his native land and his own people. He respects the things of the spirit and at the same time he consecrates his talents and skills to the common good. A good Chinese Catholic works loyally for the progress of the nation, observes the obligations of filial piety towards parents, family and country. Strengthened by the Gospel message, he will cultivate, like all good Chinese, the "five main virtues" of charity, justice, temperance, prudence and fidelity.

4. The Church seeks to respect the traditions and cultural values of every people, following what Saint Paul said when he entreated the early Christians of Philippi to treasure "whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious"[4]. From earliest times, the Church has learned to express the truth of Christ through the help of ideas and in the culture of various peoples, because the message that she preaches is intended for all peoples and nations. The Christian message is not the exclusive property of any one group or race ; it is addressed to everyone and belongs to everyone. There is therefore no opposition or incompatibility in being at the same time *truly Christian and authentically Chinese*.

In proclaiming Jesus Christ as the eternal Son of God and Savior of the world, the Church has no other aim than to be faithful to the mission entrusted to her by her Divine Founder. She has no political or economic goals, she has no worldly mission. She wants to be, in China as in any other country, the herald of the kingdom of God. She desires no privileges, but only that all those who follow Christ may be able to express their faith freely and publicly and to live according to their consciences.

Christ came to serve and to bear witness to the truth. In the same spirit the Church will offer her contribution to fostering human brotherhood and the dignity of every human being. She therefore encourages her members to be good Christians and exemplary citizens dedicated to the common good and to the service of their fellowman, and collaborating through their personal efforts to the progress of their country.

5. All this I say to you, dear brothers and sisters, because I feel so near to you. The course of history, shaped by human decisions, has been such that for many years we have not been able to have contact with each other. Very little was known about you, your joys, your hopes, and also your sufferings. Recently however, from various parts of your immense land information about you has reached me. But in those long years you have undoubtedly lived through other experiences which are still unknown, and at times you will have wondered in your consciences what was the right thing for you to do. For those who have never had such experiences it is difficult to appreciate fully such situations.

Yet, I want you to know that, all through this period and up to the present day, I, and the universal Church with me, have been with you in thought, in prayer, in genuine brotherly love and in pastoral concern. I place my trust in your faith and in the Lord who promised : "Do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour"[5]. If you remain united with the Lord in faith and prayer, *he will strengthen and guide you.*

I also wish to express my deep admiration of the testimonies of heroic faith that many of you have shown and are still showing today. The whole Church is proud of you and feels strengthened through your witness. At the same time she hopes that you in your turn have been strengthened by her continuous prayer and communion in our Lord Jesus Christ.

6. What unites us, dear brothers and sisters, is not a bond of physical nature or a political allegiance, but faith in him who is the Son of God and Savior of the world and who has proclaimed the brotherhood of all men. It is he, Jesus Christ, who loves all people irrespective of their race or culture, or their social or political status. We are all brothers and sisters, and at the center of Jesus' message is the call to universal brotherhood. Is it not inspiring to discover that a similar message is aptly expressed in your Chinese saying: "*Between the four seas, all men are brothers*"? More than at any other time, there is a need for us to proclaim this message all over the world, since injustice and discrimination among peoples and nations still linger on.

7. As I am travelling so near to your great country, let me send you a message that comes from my heart and from our common faith. At this time of grace and change, I say : open your hearts and minds to God, who in his divine providence guides all events and pursues his plan in all that happens. Out of human suffering and even out of weakness and error, the Lord creates new growth. It is my sincere and heartfelt hope that some day soon we shall all be able to join together, praising the Lord and saying : "Behold how good and pleasant it is to dwell in unity as brothers"[6].

I *entrust you all to Mary*, Virgin most faithful, Queen of China. May the peace of Jesus Christ her Son be with you all. May God bless China !

[1] *Acts* 4:12.

[2] *Col* 3:12.

[3] *Rom* 1:8, 11-12.

[4] *Phil* 4:8.

[5] *Mt* 10:19.

[6] Ps 133:1.

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