



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II  
TO THE BISHOPS OF THE PACIFIC AREA  
ON THEIR «AD LIMINA» VISIT**

*Monday, 13 February 1984*

*Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,*

1. As bishops we are gathered together today in Christ Jesus to pay homage to the wonderful works of God that have been accomplished in the history of your peoples. Ours is *a celebration of the present moment*, which recalls *the past* and looks to the future with immense hope, while we firmly trust that "he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion" (*Phil 1, 6*).

The power that we experience in the celebration of our sacramental collegiality is *the power of Jesus Christ*, "the chief Shepherd" (*1 Petr 5, 4*) of the Church, who through his Holy Spirit has directed the course of your local Churches, and brought you to this day. Yes, the person of Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word of God, the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity, the Son of the eternal Father and the Son of Mary, is the explanation of your history and of the ecclesial reality that exists all throughout the vast expanses of Micronesia, Polynesia and Melanesia. To understand your history it is necessary to understand the power of the name of Jesus, the efficacy of his precious blood and the action of his Holy Spirit. The reality of the local Churches which you represent can be perceived only when the meaning of Christ's sacrificial and saving love is grasped.

2. As we commemorate what has taken place through faith since the implantation of the Church among you, we see the realization of Christ's prophetic words: "He who believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do" (*Jo 14, 12*). With the past achievements - these "greater works" - before our eyes, I wish publicly today, in the name of Christ and his Church, *to express a debt of gratitude* for the zeal with which the Gospel has been preached and lived and communicated in your midst. It is a debt of gratitude to the first

missionaries who, in the spirit of Saint Peter Chanel, lived and died with one intention: "That the word of the Lord may speed on and triumph" (*2 Thess* 3, 1). We are for ever grateful both to the individuals who gave their lives for the Gospel and to the religious Institutes that faithfully honoured their sacred corporate commitment to evangelization. And this gratitude extends today to all who collaborate with you, the Bishops, in continuing a work begun in the power of Christ's Paschal Mystery. My thoughts turn to the successors of the heroic pioneers and to all the priests, deacons, brothers and sisters, catechists, prayer leaders and those especially committed to the word of God.

3. *The contributions of the past have been enormous*: the Church has been implanted and humanity has been advanced through the most authentic of human services. The Gospel has been brought to bear on the noble cultures of your peoples, and it continues to offer its original contribution to society, uplifting lives and directing to a higher destiny everything that is precious in them, such as human love, marriage and the family. This inculturation of the Gospel, despite imperfections and limitations, means that *Christ has in fact become*, in his members, *Micronesian, Polynesian and Melanesian*. Christ is alive in all those living by his grace; he is alive in all the communities founded on his Gospel and dispersed throughout your immense ocean.

The history of your people and their evangelization speaks clearly about the living Jesus and his mission. *Everything finds meaning in Jesus*, who says: "I must proclaim the Good News of the kingdom of God . . . because that is what I was sent to do" (*Luc* 4, 43). In the evangelization of your people, the Church exercised her own essential mission and found her own deepest identity. And because of the results of evangelization, the Church - both local and universal - feels the need to praise God for what has been done and, in the words of Saint Peter, to "declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light" (*1 Petr* 2, 9). What in effect took place was the proclamation of salvation in Jesus Christ and the initial establishment of the Kingdom of God. This involved an explicit proclamation of the name, the teaching, the life, the promise and the mystery of Christ (cf. Pauli VI, *Evangeliu Nuntiandi*, 22). And with this there came the transforming of human hearts, together with the liberating and purifying encounter of cultures with the Gospel of Christ. At every juncture of your history there were also visible those profound links between evangelization and human advancement as willed by Christ and exemplified in his own ministry. And taking into account the unceasing interplay of the Gospel and of man's concrete life, evangelization likewise meant speaking about "the rights and duties of every human being, about family life . . ., about life in society, about international life, peace, justice and development . . ." (cf. *Ibid.* 29). And for all of this in your history we praise God and express our joy today: "The Lord is king; let the earth rejoice; let the many isles be glad" (*Ps* 97, 1).

4. The same power of Jesus and of his Holy Spirit that worked marvels of grace in your past sustains you *today* in everything you do to bring the Gospel into the daily lives of your people. Your efforts, your perseverance despite difficulties and all your pastoral initiatives are performed in

union with Jesus Christ. It is he who stirs up vocations, so important for the very life of your ecclesial communities. It is he who wills your pastoral solicitude for promoting vocations and assists you in your care for the seminarians, especially in the important regional Major Seminary at Suva. The grace of Christ supports you and those who work with you in all your important apostolates, such as maintaining Catholic schools, providing religious teaching and catechetical instruction, building communities of faith, preparing the young people for their future, and assisting the laity to assume ever more effectively their rightful role in evangelization. And Christ's special grace will never be lacking to your brother priests in their ministry of generous service and in their lives of consecrated celibacy.

Your own Episcopal Conference reflects in a remarkable *way the unity of Christ's Church*. In the diversity that you represent you reflect the composition of the Church herself, taken from "every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (*Apoc 5, 9*). As Bishops you are called to promote this Catholic unity in all its dimensions of truth and love. Your own local Churches in their openness towards the universal Church and in their communion with her honour and praise the Lord Jesus who died "to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad" (*Io 11, 52*). At the same time you and your people are called to pray and work ardently for that perfect unity of all Christians, in faith and charity, which is the will of God and the object of Christ's prayer, and which, therefore, is possible in God's good time.

Your local Churches, which grow and struggle and hope in the living God, are *a sign of the vitality of the universal Church* which subsists in them. An expression of this vitality is the mystery of reconciliation that is sacramentally renewed among your faithful. Having received the reconciliation effected by Christ's blood, your local Churches are called to live this reconciliation to the full in the concrete circumstances of daily life. Reconciliation is the Christian response to the alienation that may occur between individuals, in families or in other groups. It is likewise the Christian response to the larger social and political tensions that may disturb peaceful relations in society. Together with reconciliation comes the will to work together for the common good. Every application of reconciliation has special relevance in this Jubilee Year of the Redemption. Every act of reconciliation pays homage to the blood of Jesus.

5. Pour ce qui est de *l'avenir de vos Eglises particulières*, nous sommes pleinement fondés à faire confiance à la puissance de Jésus-Christ, qui est "le même hier, aujourd'hui et pour l'éternité" (*Hebr 13, 8*). Le trésor de l'évangélisation n'est pas seulement le grand héritage du passé, mais il vous engage pour l'avenir. La semence de la parole de Dieu a déjà produit une moisson abondante dans la vie des chrétiens. Et pourtant l'action de l'évangélisation doit être consolidée, nourrie et développée. Les communautés chrétiennes doivent être amenées à rejoindre la pleine maturité dans le Christ à travers la prière, la participation aux sacrements et la vie de charité. Il faut encore que les cultures soient imprégnées plus profondément par les richesses inépuisables de la révélation de Dieu concernant la création et la Rédemption. L'Eglise a un devoir capital de pourvoir aux besoins de ceux qui ont reçu la foi et qui ont été en contact durant des générations

avec la foi, mais qui éprouvent la nécessité d'un appui pour cette foi au milieu des obstacles que rencontre leur vie chrétienne et étant donné le sécularisme qui est si répandu dans le monde moderne.

Par conséquent l'Eglise doit prendre à nouveau conscience de continuer l'évangélisation! L'Eglise a besoin de *poursuivre une action organique et continue pour soutenir la foi des croyants*. Cette action n'est autre qu'une catéchèse remplie de la vitalité de l'Évangile et exprimée dans un langage adapté aux gens dans les circonstances particulières de leur vie.

Je prie pour que l'avenir de vos Eglises particulières soit profondément marqué par des initiatives catéchétiques qui poursuivent avec zèle "le double objectif de faire mûrir la foi initiale et d'éduquer le vrai disciple du Christ par le moyen d'une connaissance plus approfondie et plus systématique de la personne et du message de Notre-Seigneur Jésus-Christ" (Ioannis Pauli II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, 19). Pour vos communautés ecclésiales, l'objet de tout programme catéchétique est de *communiquer le mystère du Christ toujours plus profondément* et de mettre les personnes en contact, en communion et en intimité avec Jésus-Christ, et, par lui, avec lui et en lui, de faire participer toujours davantage à la vie de la Trinité sainte (*Ivi*, 5).

Comme Evêques, vous êtes les catéchistes par excellence, chargés, en union avec le Pape, de la responsabilité première de la catéchèse dans vos diocèses et d'une façon générale dans l'Eglise. Une part de votre service et de votre responsabilité de pasteurs est *d'amener les fidèles à se rendre compte de leur propre responsabilité dans la participation* à la tâche exaltante de communiquer le Christ et de faire que sa parole soit toujours plus profondément agissante dans la vie des autres. J'ai essayé de souligner cet aspect important dans ma première encyclique en disant: "Il faut viser toujours davantage à ce que les différentes formes de la catéchèse . . . manifestent la participation universelle de tout le peuple de Dieu à la fonction prophétique du Christ lui-même" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II, *Redemptor Hominis*, 19). Ils sont dignes d'être cités spécialement et encouragés, les catéchistes zélés qui consacrent leur vie à la mission catéchétique de l'Eglise. Leurs noms sont inscrits dans le Livre de la Vie et le Seigneur lui-même sera leur récompense.

Chers Frères dans le Christ, le passé, le présent et l'avenir de vos diocèses sont liés au mystère du Christ qui est vivant et agissant dans son Corps, l'Eglise. Que sa présence et sa vie soient communiquées toujours davantage, tel est bien l'objet de toute votre sollicitude et de toutes vos activités! Mais comme *toute évangélisation et toute maturation de la foi à travers la catéchèse sont directement liées à l'action de l'Esprit Saint*, c'est à lui que nous nous adressons avec une particulière dévotion en ce moment de votre histoire. C'est vraiment un moment spécial pour l'Eglise à Tahiti qui célèbre cette année le 150<sup>e</sup> anniversaire du début de son évangélisation. Mais c'est aussi pour vous tous une invitation à vous consacrer de nouveau à la cause de l'Évangile. Et ce dévouement à l'Évangile doit nécessairement inclure une ouverture à l'amour et à la prière envers l'Esprit Saint qui est la source de toute sainteté et de toute vie dans le Christ. Paul VI nous

le rappelait si bien: “Les techniques d’évangélisation sont bonnes, mais les plus perfectionnées ne sauraient remplacer l’action discrète de l’Esprit” (Pauli VI, *Evangelii nuntiandi*, 75).

Je prie Marie, qui à travers l’activité de l’Esprit Saint, a conçu le Verbe de Dieu, d’intercéder pour vos populations, afin que, dans l’ouverture au même Esprit, elles parviennent à la plénitude de la vie chrétienne. Puisse l’Esprit Saint promis à l’Eglise continuer pour les générations présentes et futures à porter témoignage à Jésus et à *former Jésus dans votre cher peuple!*

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