



## The Holy See

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APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO KOREA, PAPUA NEW GUINEA,

SOLOMON ISLANDS AND THAILAND **ADDRESS OF POPE JOHN PAUL II**

**TO THE SICK RESIDENTS IN THE LEPROSARIUM OF SOROK DO** *Sorok Do Island (Korea)*

*Friday, 4 May 1984 My dear Friends,*1. In preparing for the long journey to Korea, I have looked forward with particular expectation to visiting you on this island of Sorok Do. And ever since I received a beautiful letter from you, I have wanted to come to you all the more: to be with you, to console you, to assure you of my love. Many great religions, as you know, find *the key to understanding man* in his suffering, saying that living itself is suffering, or that human life is a sea of suffering. Even the Bible speaks of the sweat of the brow and of birth-pangs as the price for bread and for new life. This insight into the human condition is not passivity or despair. Rather it implies that we human beings have to be more than we now are; we are meant to be saved in order to become our true selves. It is a joy for me to know that among yourselves, Protestants, Catholics and Buddhists, you all live together in *genuine brotherhood*. Perhaps this is so because you have tasted suffering so deeply. You who are Christians truly believe that Jesus bore our sufferings in his body, so that "through his wounds we are healed" (*Is.* 53, 5). And it is about Jesus that I wish to speak to you today.2. During his earthly life Jesus was particularly close to all who suffered. He *loved the sick*. And there were many lepers among the people of his time, and the Gospel today gives us an example. Let us re-read this Gospel passage with deep faith: "When he came down from the mountain, great crowds followed him; and behold, a leper came to him and knelt before him, saying, 'Lord, if you will, you can make me clean'" (*Matth.* 8, 1-2). Jesus had just come down from the mountain where he had proclaimed a message that completely upset the way people usually think: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted . . . Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven" (*Ibid.* 5, 3-4. 11-12). What people normally call curses Jesus called beatitudes. This he did because *by redeeming our suffering he gave it an immense value*, that only the believing heart can know.3. *The Gospel of suffering is necessary especially for you who live in this place-you who have been struck by leprosy*. It is necessary for you to know that *Christ is particularly close to you*. In this Gospel of suffering we find praise for those who have persevered in the midst of the trials of suffering. We read: "You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful" (*Jac.* 5, 11). The reward for human suffering is found in *Christ's Redemption*, because as Saint Paul says, it is through our sufferings that we "complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the Church" (*Col.* 1, 24). To the unspeakable anguish of the question "Why me?" Jesus offers the living answer of his own death on the Cross, for he suffered entirely for others, giving himself in unending love. Since then, we too "always carry in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies" (*2 Cor.* 4, 10). In this way we can understand how Christ's suffering, death and Resurrection - his redeeming act of love - is truly *the source of the dignity of all suffering*, as well as the pledge of the

future glory that is to be revealed in us (Cf. *Rom.* 8, 18).<sup>4</sup> In his letter to the early Christians, Saint James recommends that if anyone is sick among them the presbyters of the Church should come to them. My dear friends, I come to you today as a priest and bishop, the Bishop of Rome. Like the presbyters of the early Church, *it is my desire to pray over you*, to sing for you the praises of the Lord, to anoint you with oil in the name of the Lord; and I beg God that the "prayer of faith" may be your salvation (Cf. *Jac.* 5, 13-15). *May the Lord raise you up* with his grace, so that your souls may be ready for the glory of eternal life, and that your bodies, weakened by illness, may find comfort and strength in this hope through which your souls live!<sup>5</sup> In conclusion, I would like to offer a word of special greeting to the staff and all those who assist the residents of this leprosarium. My friends, yours is a *most noble, selfless service* of humanity that few can bring themselves to render. And yet, I am sure that you are the ones who receive the most, even though you give so generously. For in the paradox of love it is the weak that sustain the strong and the sick that heal the healthy. May the Lord reward your kind hearts with joy, peace and an increase of love. My particular thanks go also to the dedicated members of the Catholic Leprosy Workers' Association, who for over thirty years have tirelessly served our afflicted brethren at Anyang, Ch'ilgok and elsewhere. May all leprosy patients, may all the forgotten and neglected sick of this land and of the world, rejoice and be consoled *in the knowledge of being especially loved by Jesus* who suffered so that we might all share his risen life. My beloved friends, I embrace you in the love of Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Saviour of the world! © Copyright 1984 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana