



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO BISHOPS OF THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE OF INDIA
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

*Consistory Hall
Monday, 16 May 2011*

Dear Brother Bishops,

It gives me great joy to welcome you as you make your visit *ad Limina Apostolorum* during this Easter season. Through you I extend my greetings to all the faithful in your care, and I thank Cardinal Telesphore Placidus Toppo for the gracious sentiments of communion with the Successor of Peter which he has expressed on your behalf.

The Risen Christ's presence among his disciples was a source of deep consolation for them, confirming them in their faith and deepening their love for him; and at his Ascension, he commissioned them, saying, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (*Mt 28:19-20*). This command impelled your own great patron Saint Thomas, the other Apostles and those who followed them, to preach the Gospel among the nations; and through the preaching of the word and the celebration of the sacraments, the divine life of the Blessed Trinity has been passed on to many Christian souls.

Today, as in every age, the apostolic mandate finds its source and its central focus in the proclamation of the Incarnate Son of God, who is the fullness of divine revelation and "the way, the truth, and the life" (*Jn 14:6*). The Saviour of all creation, he is the bearer of Good News for all and the fulfilment of man's deepest yearnings. The definitive revelation of God which comes to us in Jesus Christ and which believers throughout the world joyfully proclaim is expressed in a particular way in the sacred Scriptures and in the sacramental life of the Church. Christ's saving power is also proclaimed in the lives of the saints who have wholeheartedly taken up the Gospel message

and lived it faithfully among their brothers and sisters. Christian revelation, when accepted in freedom and by the working of God's grace, transforms men and women from within and establishes a wonderful, redemptive relationship with God our heavenly Father, through Christ, in the Holy Spirit. This is the heart of the message we teach, this is the great gift we offer in charity to our neighbour: a share in the very life of God.

Within the Church, believers' first steps along the way of Christ must always be accompanied by a sound catechesis that will allow them to flourish in faith, love and service. Some of you have told me of the challenges you face in this regard, and I support you in your commitment to provide quality formation in this area. Recognizing that catechesis is distinct from theological speculation, priests, religious and lay catechists need to know how to communicate with clarity and loving devotion the life-transforming beauty of Christian living and teaching, which will enable and enrich the encounter with Christ himself. This is especially true of the preparation of the faithful to meet our Lord in the sacraments.

In relation to the wider world, the Christian commitment to live and to bear witness to the Gospel offers distinct challenges in every time and place. This is certainly true of your country, which is home to various ancient religions, including Christianity. The Christian life in such societies always demands honesty and sincerity about one's own beliefs, and respect for those of one's neighbour. The presentation of the Gospel in such circumstances, therefore, involves the delicate process of inculturation. This is an undertaking which respects and maintains the uniqueness and integrity of the divine revelation given to the Church as her inheritance, while showing that it is intelligible and attractive to those to whom it is proposed. The process of inculturation requires that priests, religious and lay catechists carefully employ the languages and appropriate customs of the people they serve in presenting the Good News. As you strive to meet the challenging circumstances of proclaiming that message in the various cultural settings in which you find yourselves, you, my dear brother Bishops, are called to oversee this process with a fidelity to the deposit of faith which has been handed down to us to maintain and transmit. Combine that fidelity with sensitivity and creativity, so that you may give a convincing account of the hope that is within you (cf. *1 Pet* 3:15).

With regard to interreligious dialogue, I am aware of the challenging circumstances many of you face as you develop a dialogue with those of other religious beliefs, all the while encouraging an atmosphere of tolerant interaction. Your dialogue should be characterized by a constant regard for that which is true, in order to foster mutual respect while avoiding semblances of syncretism.

Moreover, as Indian Christians strive to live in peace and harmony with their neighbours of other beliefs, your prudent leadership will be crucial in the civil and moral task of working to safeguard the fundamental human rights of freedom of religion and freedom of worship. As you know, these rights are based upon the common dignity of all human beings and are recognized throughout the concert of nations. The Catholic Church strives to promote these rights for all religions throughout the world. I encourage you, therefore, to work patiently to establish the common ground necessary

for the harmonious enjoyment of these basic rights in your communities. Even if he encounters opposition, the Christian's own charity and forbearance should serve to convince others of the rightness of religious tolerance, from which the followers of all religions stand to gain. My prayers accompany you as you continue to address this sensitive and important question.

My brothers in the Episcopacy, I am grateful for this opportunity to renew our bonds of communion. May [Blessed Teresa of Calcutta](#), whose patient, personal service to her neighbour was motivated by the love of Christ, obtain for you an abundance of heavenly graces to ensure the spiritual fruitfulness of your pastoral work. I assure you and all whom you serve of a constant remembrance in my prayers, and I willingly impart to you my Apostolic Blessing.