



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC PILGRIMAGE TO INDIA

LITURGY OF THE WORD AT THE AIRPORT OF MANGALORE

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Thursday, 6 February 1986

*Dear Brother Bishops,
Honourable Civil Authorities,
Brothers and Sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ
Dear Friends,*

I am extremely happy to have this opportunity to visit your region during my pilgrimage through India, this vast and ancient country, so alive and so full of promise. I am grateful to all of you for your warm welcome. I acknowledge with particular appreciation the presence of all those who are engaged in the cultural, social and political life of this region.

I express my cordial esteem for the members of the various Christian Churches and ecclesial communities, and for all our Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Jain, Buddhist and Parsee friends. May we all be united in a sincere desire to serve the cause of peace and progress among all peoples without distinction or discrimination, since we share a common belief in God, our Creator and Father.

To the members of the Catholic community, to the pastors and faithful, to the priests and seminarians, to the men and women religious, to the catechists, and to all who share in the priestly, prophetic and royal office of Christ, to you I repeat the words of Saint Paul to the Philippians: "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit" .

1. The reading from Saint Luke's Gospel which we have just heard has presented for our contemplation the Visitation of Mary, "the handmaid of the Lord" , to her cousin Elizabeth. This

very human encounter reveals not only the value and beauty of the love between the two cousins. Above all it introduces us into the mystery of the divine initiative which gives concrete expression to God's unbounded love for man and opens the way to our eternal destiny: the Incarnation.

Having given her free consent to the realisation of God's plan, Mary goes in haste to her cousin to help her in her time of need. Mary also wishes to share with her the Good News that the Lord was fulfilling the promise of salvation made to their forefathers and kept alive in Israel through the preaching of the Prophets and in the Scriptures.

Moved by the Spirit of God, Elizabeth recognises the presence of the long-awaited Messiah in the womb of her young cousin and greets her as "the Mother of my Lord". Her own unborn son too is touched by the saving presence of the Messiah. It is a presence which can be fully experienced only through faith, in the Spirit.

"Blessed is she who believed...".

This blessing belongs fully to Mary "who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her from the Lord" . But it likewise embraces all those who follow Mary along the path of faith, for she is "the Church's model and excellent exemplar in faith and charity" .

Today this blessing embraces us as we honour her. Our devotion testifies to the truth of her own words:

"My spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,
for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden.
For behold henceforth all generations will call me blessed,
for he who is mighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his name" .

2. The Second Vatican Council has wished to present Mary's special place in the history of salvation in relation to the mystery of Christ and to the mystery of Church. Because of her unique role in Christ's life and work she has become the exemplar of the Church's life and mission. What Mary has been to Jesus the Church is now called to be in the fulfilment of Christ's saving work to the ends of the earth.

Like Mary bringing to Elizabeth the Good News of salvation and the presence of the Saviour himself, the Church exists down through the centuries to proclaim the Gospel message to all peoples and to offer them the light, life and love of Christ the Saviour.

For millennia India has been the cradle of great religions and of ancient civilisations. Christianity has lived side by side in harmony with these traditions for almost two thousand years. Nearly five

centuries ago the Church sent heralds of the Gospel to this region of the vast Indian subcontinent. The purpose of the Church here in India as everywhere has been to proclaim the promise of life in Christ, in whom " all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross" .

The Church is dedicated to this work of reconciliation and service in the spirit of Jesus himself. As the prophet Isaiah foretold, Jesus was sent into the world "not to break a bruised reed, nor to quench a dimly burning wick", rather "as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations" .

During the past centuries and today, the Church carries on this work of the Son and servant of God in this region of India through the selfless service of innumerable men and women of faith and untiring love.

3. Having come to know in greater detail the work done by the Christian communities along this beautiful West Coast and in the whole of Karnataka, and indeed throughout India, I rejoice with the same sentiments of Mary: the Lord has done great things among his people! .

The fervent communities of faith and love that have sprung up all over this region; the educational institutions that have prepared so many young men and women for their responsible participation in the development of the country; the health centres that for over a century have been caring for the sick and the needy without exception or distinction; and the many other activities of the Christian community for the uplifting and development of the people of this region: all of this is a living testimony to the servant mission of Christ's Church.

The Church is the pilgrim people of God travelling forward towards its goal, the eschatological Kingdom in the Father's house. As the Church moves among and together with other communities and religious traditions, "she recognises in the poor and the suffering the likeness of her poor and suffering Founder" . She feels, therefore, especially called to defend and promote everywhere the inalienable dignity of every man, woman and child, in every nation, and of every social condition.

At the servant of Christ and of his Church, I thank the Lord for the works of faith and love which are carried out in his name among you. The Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth may also be contemplated as an inspiration for your loving service to your fellow citizens. I wish to sustain your faith and encourage your commitment to an ever more generous service of your country.

I appeal to all the sons and daughters of the Church: be faithful witnesses of the Risen Lord, be the light that radiates the love of God among your fellow men and women.

4. To you, brother bishops, whom the Holy Spirit has appointed to guard the Church of Jesus Christ, I address the appeal of Saint Peter: "Tend the flock of God that is your charge... being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd is manifested, you will obtain the unfading

crown of glory" . May you find in your communion with the Bishop of Rome and the universal Church great strength for all your pastoral service.

Beloved priests, beloved religious and lay apostles: you are very dear to me. In you I see the disciples of Jesus, the servant of God. You are his witnesses in the Church of today. You have been chosen by Christ and you have committed yourselves to be his instruments for the building up of his Body. Be worthy of your vocation and generous in fulfilling your mission. Be united with your bishops and fully dedicated to your people in selfless and persevering service. Be loyal to Christ and his Church, ever more authentic signs of his Kingdom.

5. Beloved fellow Christians present at this gathering, who openly confess Jesus Christ as God and Lord, sole mediator between God and man: together let us raise our hearts in praise to our heavenly Father. Let us thank him for that degree of unity already existing between us because of our baptism in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. The will of Christ impels us to continue to seek that fullness of communion and peace which alone responds to Christ's prayer at the Last Supper: "That they may all be one; even as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me" . May the ecumenical path that we have embraced lead us to ever greater fidelity to the Lord of our lives!

6. I am glad to see here many friends belonging to other religious persuasions. Your presence is an eloquent token of your fellowship with your Christian neighbours and, I am sure, it means that you recognise the need for all religious traditions to join hands against the forces which militate against the human and spiritual dignity of human beings. Living in a pluralistic world filled with tensions and conflicts, religious communities must be the first to live in peace and harmony with each other, in mutual acceptance and co-operation. May God's blessings be upon all of you, upon your communities and families, upon your enterprises and commitments for the service of your country.

7. Upon the distinguished representatives of public life, I ask Almighty God to bestow wisdom and courage so that you may be effective "promoters of order and peace among men" . May you always work for the ideals of freedom, justice and peace, harmonising cultural, linguistic and religious diversities in the pursuit of social and economic progress, and of communal fellowship.

I have learnt with sorrow of the prevailing drought conditions in the State of Karnataka. Many areas have no water, and human beings as well as animals suffer from want of food and drink. My heart goes out in sympathy to all those who are suffering. I would ask the local churches in Karnataka to do their best in collaborating with the government and voluntary organisations to help in this time of need, thus showing once again their vocation of service to mankind. I pray the Lord to send abundant rain down upon the parched land of Karnataka, and make it give food to the hungry and drink to the thirsty, so that, being strengthened in body, they may all give glory to their heavenly Father.

I wish at this time to recall also the victims of the tragedies that accompany man's efforts to make progress. In particular, I commend to the Lord the large number of people who lost their lives in Bhopal in December 1984. I also recall those who lived through the sad events there but have suffered greatly. I pray that they will experience the fullness of fraternal solidarity of which they have need.

8. To all of you: to the young who look to the future with great expectations; to the old, sick and suffering who turn to the Lord for solace and comfort; to the farmers and workers who transform the God-given riches of this region into means for sustenance and growth; to the families of the poor and the rich; and in particular to the thousands of emigrants from this region: to all of you I say a word of esteem and brotherly love.

Let us pray together for a world in which every individual will be treated as a child of the Living God! And let us all work together for a civilisation of peace and love, in which all human beings will be inspired by the great ideal of serving God and their fellow men!

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