



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC PILGRIMAGE TO BANGLADESH, SINGAPORE, FIJI ISLANDS,
NEW ZEALAND, AUSTRALIA AND SEYCHELLES

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Dacca (Bangladesh), 19 November 1986

"How great is your name, O Lord our God, through all the earth".

*Dear Archbishop Michael Rozario and the other Bishops of Bangladesh,
Dear Bishops of Burma,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

1. Through all the earth, in every country, among every people, the name of the Most High God is known and adored. No less so in Bangladesh. In this land in which we are gathered for the celebration of the Eucharist, man, and every creature that God has placed in his power - in the words of the Psalm: "all of them, sheep and cattle, yes, even the savage beasts, birds of the air, and fish that make their way through the waters" - all proclaim the glory of the one God and praise his holy name.

Brothers and sisters of Bangladesh: people of different races, languages and religions, let us join together, as members of the same human family, in adoring the Most Merciful God: How great is your name, O God, through all the earth!

Brother bishops, dear priests, men and women religious, and lay people of Bangladesh: I thank the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has made it possible for me to celebrate this Holy Mass in your midst, in your own land. You are a "little flock", but you are very close to the heart of the Successor of Peter.

Distinguished men and women of Bangladesh, representatives of Government and public life,

religious leaders and representatives of the world of culture and the arts: I thank you for your presence and for the warm welcome you have given me. I speak to you as a brother, as one deeply concerned for the fate of humanity, as a pilgrim of peace and a seeker of justice according to God's will.

2. Who is it that gives praise and glory to God? It is the entire universe, every creature. But above all it is man who acknowledges and adores his Creator. For this very purpose all things have been put under his control. As the Psalm says: "You have made him little less than a god; with glory and honour you crowned him, gave him power over the works of your hand, put all things under his feet".

Commenting on this idea, the Second Vatican Council teaches that "man, created in God's image, received a mandate to subject to himself the earth and all that it contains, and to govern the world with justice and holiness, a mandate to relate himself and the totality of things to him who was to be acknowledged as the Lord and Creator of all. So, by the subjection of all things to man, the name of God would be wonderful in all the earth".

Man's task in this world, therefore, is "to make life more human and to render the whole earth submissive to this goal". In this sense man is lord of all material reality. Indeed, he is the "priest" of the cosmos, whose duty it is to proclaim, in the name of all creatures, the adorable greatness of the Almighty and to give the entire universe back to the Creator as a pleasing sacrifice.

In this universal religious perspective man's great and inalienable dignity is immediately recognisable. Where this dignity is marred by poverty, hunger and disease, a lack of proper living conditions and of opportunities for education and work, the conscience of the world needs to be alerted to the duty of defending God's image in man. In Bangladesh too, professionals and leaders have ample scope for the service of their fellow citizens, in building a just society and in responding to the urgent needs of so many people. Motivated and inspired by true human, moral and religious values they can give new direction and impulse to the task of development and progress.

3. In the broad setting of man's duty to serve his fellowman and to give glory to God, this ceremony of priestly ordination assumes a particular significance. Eighteen sons of this land are being given a share in the ministerial priesthood of Jesus Christ, Prophet, Priest and King of the new and eternal Covenant. Through the anointing of the Holy Spirit they are being set apart for the building up of God's people through a specific ministry and service of love.

Above all. these young men, who are our brothers, are being empowered to act in the person of Christ, offering the Eucharistic Sacrifice on behalf of all the people.

Do you realize, dear candidates, the dignity and responsibility that will be yours? You have been

preparing for this moment of grace for many years. With trust in Christ' and in the loving protection of Mary, commit yourselves whole-heartedly to the task now being laid on your shoulders.

4. The ministerial priesthood is conferred on those who have received a particular grace from God. It is a special vocation and requires a personal call: "No one takes this honour upon himself, but he is called by God".

The vocation of Jeremiah narrated in the first reading is a type and model of every special vocation: "Before you were born I consecrated you: I appointed you . . . I am with you".

In the inner experience of each priest and of each brother and sister in the consecrated life there is an awareness of that personal call from God, an awareness which is produced under the impulse of grace and steadily grows into that certainty of which Saint Paul says: "I know him in whom I have believed and I am confident".

This certainty is the certainty of being loved, personally and uniquely, by Christ, the Shepherd of our souls. The Gospel reading recalls those words of Jesus at the Last Supper: "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you, abide in my love". All of Christ's disciples hear these words in their hearts. But they are heard with dramatic effect by those who receive a share in the ministry of the Apostles, for to them Jesus says in a special way: "You are my friends . . . No longer do I call you servants . . . I chose you and appointed you that you should go forth and bear fruit".

It is important for perseverance and fruitfulness in the priestly ministry that we never lose contact with the person who spoke these words.

What does Christ expect from you, his friends? He looks for your love. "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you". And then he shows how far this love should go: "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends". Of this love Jesus himself gave the perfect example, and every time that you celebrate the Eucharist you will recall and renew his saving Sacrifice for the glory of the Father and the salvation of the world.

Your service to the community will take many forms, and all of them must express this love. When you preach the word of life and administer the sacraments of faith, when you travel up and down this land to reach your brothers and sisters in need, when you heal the soul, when you educate and encourage the young, when you help to consolidate development and peace with justice and compassion for all. let love be your inspiration and your strength. Then you will bear "fruit that abides", which nurtures the divine life of souls and the vitality of the community of God's people, the "Body of Christ", to which the second reading refers.

Saint Paul's exhortation in that reading - "to live a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love" - is directed

to the "building up of the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ". In other words, the life of the Church in Bangladesh is intimately linked to the strength of your love for Christ.

5. The words of Saint Paul find their echo in the theme chosen for this visit of mine: Communion and Brotherhood. What better programme of priestly ministry than for these newly ordained priests and for the entire Church in Bangladesh to make a resolution to strengthen the bonds that unite the disciples of Christ in the communion of the "one body and one Spirit . . . one Lord, one faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of us all. who is above all and through all and in all"; and, at the same time, to build up and strengthen the bonds of brotherhood, freedom, harmony and justice throughout the entire national community.

6. You must try to show your Muslim brethren and the followers of the other religious traditions that your Christian faith, far from weakening your sense of pride in your homeland and your love for her, helps you to prize and respect the culture and heritage of Bangladesh. It inspires you to face the challenges of the present day with love and responsibility.

Just over a year ago I had the pleasure of addressing a large gathering of Muslim young people at Casablanca in Morocco. I spoke to them, as I now speak to the young people of Bangladesh, of the many things that Christians and Muslims have in common as human beings and as believers. I stressed that "dialogue between Christians and Muslims is today more necessary than ever".

The Catholic Church is committed to a path of dialogue and collaboration with the men and women of good will of every religious tradition. We have many spiritual resources in common which we must share with one another as we work for a more human world. Young people especially know how to be open with each other and they want a world in which all basic freedoms, including freedom of religious belief, will be respected.

Sometimes Christians and Muslims fear and distrust one another as a result of past misunderstanding and conflict. This is also true in Bangladesh. Everyone, especially the young, must learn always to respect one another's religious beliefs and to defend freedom of religion, which is the right of every human being.

7. The words of Christ are repeated today in this land: "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you".

He speaks these words to you young men chosen for the priesthood!

To all of you who are the Church in Bangladesh!

He speaks them to everyone who lives in this land!

And he then goes on to say: Abide in the love of Christ! Keep fervent wish and prayer of the Successor of Peter who visits you today. Abide in the love of Christ! Keep his commandments, just as Christ kept his Father's commandments and so abides in his love.

Dear brothers and sisters: abide in the love of the Father! In the love of God! "So that your joy may be full".

Amen.

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