



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

New Delhi — Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium

HOMILY

Sunday, 7 November 1999

"Walk as children of light, for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true" (Eph 5:8-9).

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. Today throughout this vast country many people are celebrating the Festival of Lights. We rejoice with them, and in this Eucharist here in New Delhi, in India, on the continent of Asia, we too exult in the light and bear witness to the One who is "the true light that enlightens every man" (*Jn 1:8*).

God, the Father of mercies, has given me the joy of coming among you to promulgate the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, the result of the labours of the Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops held last year in Rome. What was this Synod for Asia? It was a gathering of Bishops representing the Church on this continent. What did the Bishops do? Above all, they listened in prayer to the Spirit; they reflected on the path followed so far by the Church among the peoples of Asia; they recognized the grace of the "hour" that the Church is now living on this continent; they committed the entire People of God to ever greater fidelity to the Lord and to the evangelical task which he has entrusted to all the baptized for the good of the human family.

2. Here today, dear brothers and sisters, you represent the Catholic community not only of India but of the whole Asian continent, and I place in your hands the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation as a guide for the spiritual and pastoral life of the Church on this continent as we enter a new century and a new Christian Millennium.

It is fitting that this document has been signed and issued in India, the home of many of Asia's time-honoured cultures, religions and spiritual traditions. These ancient Asian civilizations have shaped the lives of the peoples of this continent

and have left an indelible mark on the history of the human race. Distinguished representatives of various Christian Communities and of the great religions of India are present here today. I greet them all with esteem and friendship, and I place before them my hope and dream that the next century will be a time of fruitful dialogue, leading to a new relationship of understanding and solidarity among the followers of all religions.

3. I wish to thank Archbishop Alan de Lastic, the pastor of the Archdiocese which is hosting this Eucharistic assembly, for his kind words of welcome. I greet all my brother Bishops of the Latin Church, of the Syro-Malabar Church and the Syro-Malankara Church. I embrace the Cardinals and Bishops who have come from other countries to share the joy of this occasion.

I am grateful to the large number of priests present, who share the one priesthood of Jesus Christ with the Bishops and priests of Asia and the world. Dear brother priests, take as your rule of life those words of the Ordination liturgy: "Receive the Gospel of Christ whose servant you are, meditate on the Law of God, believe what you read, preach what you believe and practise what you preach".

With great affection in the Lord I greet the men and women Religious. Whether you are engaged in contemplation or working in the active apostolate, your witness to the supremacy of the spirit places you at the very heart of the Church's life and mission in Asia. For this, I thank you and encourage you.

In a special way I entrust the fruits of the Synod to the members of the laity, for it is you above all who are called to transform society by infusing the "mind of Christ" into the mentality, customs, laws and structures of the world in which you live (cf. *Ecclesia in Asia*, 22). One of the main challenges before you is to bring the light of the Gospel to bear on the family, and on the defence of human life and dignity. You bear witness to your faith in a world of contrasts. On the one hand there has been enormous economic and technological progress, on the other there still exist situations of extreme poverty and injustice. The Synod re-echoed the cry of the ancient Prophets, the cry for justice, for the right ordering of human society, without which there can be no true worship of God (cf. *Is* 1:10-17; *Am* 5:21-24; *Ecclesia in Asia*, 41). The Church looks to the lay men and women of Asia to reflect the light of Christ wherever the darkness of sin, division and discrimination distorts the image of God in his children.

4. *"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (Jn 1:5).*

These words of Saint John in today's Gospel speak to us of Jesus Christ. His life and work are the light which illumines our journey to our transcendent destiny. The Good News of the Saviour's Incarnation, and of his Death and Resurrection for our sake, illumines the Church's path as she makes her pilgrim way through history towards the fullness of Redemption.

The Synod which we are closing today rejoiced at the thought of Jesus's birth on Asian soil. The Eternal Word took flesh as an Asian! And it was on this continent, through the preaching of the Gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit, that the Church went forth to spread the Good News. With Christians throughout the world, the Church in Asia will cross the threshold of the new millennium, giving thanks for all that God has worked from those beginnings until now. Just as the first millennium saw the Cross firmly planted in the soil of Europe, and the second in that of America and Africa, so may

the Third Christian Millennium witness a *great harvest of faith* on this vast and vital continent (cf. *Ecclesia in Asia*, 1).

5. As we stand on the threshold of the Great Jubilee which will commemorate the two thousandth anniversary of the Birth of Jesus Christ, the community of his disciples is called to redress the great refusal mentioned in the Prologue of Saint John's Gospel: "the world came to be through him, but the world did not know him. He came to his own, but his own did not accept him" (1:10-11). The Eternal Word, "the true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world" (*ibid.*, 1:9). But instead of spreading freely, that light is often hindered and obscured by darkness. In the heart of the sinner, that light is rejected. And the sins of individuals coalesce and harden into social structures of injustice, into economic and cultural imbalances which discriminate against people and force them to the margins of society. The sign that we are truly celebrating the Jubilee as the year of the Lord's favour (cf. *Is* 61:2) will be our conversion to the light and our efforts to restore equity and to advance justice at every level of society.

6. "To all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God" (*Jn* 1:12).

In the Eucharist we give thanks to God the Father for his many gifts to us, and especially for the gift of his beloved Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the faithful and true witness (cf. *Rev* 3:14).

The Synod reminds Asian Christians that "Jesus' perfectly human life, devoted wholly to the love and service of the Father and of man, reveals that the vocation of every human being is to receive love and give love in return" (*ibid.*, 13). In the Saints we marvel at the inexhaustible capacity of the human heart to love God and man, even when this involves great suffering. Does not also the legacy of so many wise teachers in India and in the other lands of Asia point in a similar direction? Such teaching is still valid today. Indeed, it is needed more than ever! The world will only be transformed if men and women of good will, and whole nations, genuinely accept that the only path worthy of the human family is the path of peace, of mutual respect, understanding and love, and solidarity with those in need.

Dear brothers and sisters, what does the Church need of her members at the dawn of a new millennium? Above all, that you be witnesses who are convincing because you embody in your lives the message you proclaim. As *Ecclesia in Asia* reminds us all: a fire can only be lit by something that is itself on fire. The Gospel can only be preached if Bishops, clergy, those in the consecrated life, and the laity are themselves on fire with the love of Christ and burning with zeal to make him known, loved and followed (cf. No. 23).

This is the Synod's message: a message of love and hope for the peoples of this continent. May the Church in Asia heed this message so that all "may have life and have it abundantly" (*Jn* 10:10). Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.