



The Holy See

ADDESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE MEMBERS OF THE INDIAN COMMUNITY IN ROME

Thursday, 12 June 1986

Dear Friends,

It is truly a great pleasure for me to meet all of you here today. You are the members of the Indian community of Rome, residing in this city for reasons of work or study, far from your homeland. You have wished to have this meeting with the Pope in order to re-live as it were the joy and spiritual significance of the pilgrimage which God enabled me to make to your country in the early days of February.

1. When I recall that wonderful time, the first sentiment which fills my heart is one of deep gratitude. Gratitude above all to our heavenly Father who gave me the opportunity to fulfil my apostolic mission in a direct and immediate way. Gratitude too to the people of India, in all the richness and variety of their ethnic and cultural diversity. I assure you that I approached the citizens of your country with immense respect for the spiritual and human achievements of one of the most ancient and glorious civilizations. And I received in return wherever I went a warm and hospitable welcome from your people and from the national and local authorities. To all I am deeply indebted.

2. In continuity with its past, but always seeking to develop according to the demands of the contemporary world, India today occupies a prominent place in the process and discussions that seek to respond to the great challenges facing humanity. On a number of occasions during my visit I expressed the conviction that India's spiritual vision of man can constitute a much needed contribution to the emergence of a true humanism that will enable modern man to give a constructive form to the transformations taking place in society. As I stated in New Delhi: " The true liberation of man will only be brought about, as also the elimination of all that militates against human dignity, when the spiritual vision of man is held in honour and pursued " .

In visiting India I was concerned to draw attention to the spiritual basis of all genuine human

progress. At Raj Ghat I had the opportunity to honour the memory of a most outstanding interpreter of the soul of India, Mahatma Gandhi. He taught that " if all men and women, whatever the differences between, them, cling to the truth, with respect for the unique dignity of every human being, a new world order – a civilization of love – can be achieved " .

3. One significant aim of my pilgrimage to India was to meet the great spiritual traditions which have enriched the life of your country for thousands of years. The Second Vatican Council bequeathed to the Church the task of entering into sincere and respectful dialogue with the followers of other religions. This dialogue does not mean a superficial disregard of the profound differences that exist between us. Rather, it is precisely because we often differ on certain important points that an attitude of mutual respect and esteem is all the more necessary. Furthermore, it is consonant with the Christian message of unity and love to insist especially on " what human beings have in common and on what promotes fellowship among them " .

The Church is strongly convinced that there are many religious, social and public questions in which close and fruitful collaboration is possible, indeed necessary.

In a climate of openness and friendship I was able to meet many representatives of the Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain and Parsee traditions. It is my ardent hope that these meetings will help to further interreligious dialogue.

One of the urgent questions of our time, one in which men and women of good will of all religions share a common concern and interest, is the question of peace in the world. In this respect you are aware that many religious leaders have responded to my appeal for a meeting of prayer for peace to be held at Assisi on 27 October of this year. I would ask you to pray for this intention.

4. At each stage of my visit I was deeply aware of being a pilgrim to the shrine of the People of God in India. My contacts with the local Churches, with the bishops, priests, men and women religious and laity, were marked by genuine spiritual joy and fellowship in the love of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I was able to experience the richness and variety of the Church's life in your land. In each area the one faith, the same sacraments, and communion in the same ecclesial life constitute a manifestation of the universality of the Body of Christ; and at the same time all this is lived according to the traditions of the three communities: the Latin Church, the Oriental Church of Syro-Malabar rite, and that of Syro-Malankara rite. Especially in Kerala the rich traditions of each rite were sources of spiritual devotion and liturgical participation.

I had numerous meetings with representatives of the other Christian Churches and communities present in the various regions. I hope that these meetings will give fresh impetus to the cause of ecumenism, which stands before all the disciples of Christ as an urgent imperative emanating from

the express intention of the Lord himself: that all may be one .

I was able to visit some of the places connected with the preaching and martyrdom of Saint Thomas, to whom the Church in India traces its origin. Then too I visited the tomb of the other great apostle of India, Saint Francis Xavier, at Goa. One of the moments of greatest spiritual intensity was the Mass of Beatification of Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara and Sister Alphonsa at Kottayam on 8 February. A son and a daughter of Kerala and of the Syro-Malabar Church, both of them were filled with intense love for Christ and for his Church. They are exemplary witnesses of the long tradition of holiness and religious consecration which marks the Church in India. By their intercession may they continue to sustain the Church's work of service and of bearing witness to the Gospel in your land.

5. It is impossible to summarize in a few words the entire experience of this pilgrimage. There must follow a period of reflection, not only on the external events connected with the visit itself, but especially on " the grace of God which has been shown in the churches " .

The challenges which lie before the ecclesial community in India are intimately related to the great tasks which India herself faces. The path of the Church can be none other than the defence of human dignity at all levels and the humble service of every person in need. These are themes on which all the great religious traditions of India can meet and collaborate. I wish to encourage you along this path.

I am happy to know that, although you are far from your native country, you remain in contact with each other while you are in Rome. In this way you seek to remain close to your own cultural heritage and you offer each other support and solidarity.

May Almighty God bless you and sustain you all in this phase of your lives. And may he grant his peace and love to you and to your families.

© Copyright 1986 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana