



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS OF JAPAN
ON THEIR AD LIMINA VISIT**

Saturday, 3 March 1990

Dear Brothers Bishops of Japan,

1. It is a great joy for me to welcome you to Rome on the occasion of your *ad Limina* visit. Through you I wish to greet with esteem all the beloved Catholic people of Japan, whose faith and devotion were so evident to me during my Pastoral Visit to your country in 1981. As a brother Bishop who has been charged in a particular way with solicitude for all the Churches (Cfr. 2 Cor. 11, 28), I pray with you that the faithful of Japan will truly "grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love" (Eph. 4, 15-16).

These words from the Letter to the Ephesians help us to reflect more deeply upon the meaning of your visit to this City. By praying at the tombs of the two "pillars" of the Church of Rome, Saints Peter and Paul, and by meeting with Peter's Successor, you bear witness to the unity in which the Body of Christ is "joined and knit together". Your journey to Rome manifests the catholicity of the one Church of Christ and invites you to a deeper communion with all other local Churches as well. The *ad Limina* visit is also an occasion to share the experiences and insights, as well as the challenges of the Church in Japan with the Pope and with those who assist him in his universal ministry. Through your affection for him, your solidarity with him in upholding the Church's doctrine and discipline, and through your ready cooperation with his collaborators, the Church's universal communion is concretely expressed and strengthened.

2. To speak of the growth and upbuilding of Christ's Body is to speak of the forward movement of

the People of God on its earthly pilgrimage. It is to speak of the commission which the Church has received from her Risen Lord "to 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" (*Matth.* 28, 19-20). As the Second Vatican Council taught, "*the pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature*" (*Ad Gentes*, 2), and hence the task of evangelization will always remain her "grace and vocation, her deepest identity" (Cfr. Pauli VI *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 14). Indeed, we can say, in the words of my predecessor Pope Paul VI, that the Church exists "in order to evangelize" (*Ibid*).

For this reason, I join you in praising God for the great gift to the Church in Japan that was the "*National Incentive Convention for Evangelization*", held in Kyoto in November of 1987. This significant ecclesial event followed an intense preparation on the part of all the clergy, religious and laity, and represented an unprecedented opportunity for the faithful to reflect on their vocation to be evangelizers within the society to which they belong. Following the teaching of the Council, the Convention recognized that all the baptized have "the exalted duty of working for the ever greater spread of the divine plan of salvation to all people, of every epoch and all over the earth" (*Lumen Gentium*, 33). And as the "universal sacrament of salvation" (*Lumen Gentium*, 48), the Church as a whole is called "to be a leaven and, as it were, the soul of human society in its renewal by Christ and transformation into the family of God" (*Ibid.* 40).

A deepening awareness of God's call to proclaim the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ should penetrate every aspect of the Church's life in Japan. Although your local Churches form a small minority, they must nonetheless strive to make *the light of Christ shine brightly, so as to help non-Christians to see this light, to accept it, and to be transformed by it through faith and Baptism*. No believer may be dispensed from the task of making Christ's love known to all. For if, with Saint Paul, we can say: "the love of Christ compels us" (2 *Cor.* 5, 14), we must likewise add, as he does: "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!" (1 *Cor.* 9, 16). As the Conciliar Decree "*Ad Gentes*" reminds us: "It is not sufficient for the Christian people to be present or established in a particular nation, nor sufficient that it should merely exercise the apostolate of good example; it has been established and it is present so that it might by word and deed proclaim Christ to non-Christian fellow countrymen and help them towards a full reception of Christ" (*Ad Gentes*, 15).

3. One of the hopes of the National Incentive Convention was that the faithful be inspired to read the "signs of the times" so that in union with their Pastors they can *identify and respond to a number of Japan's social problems in the light of the Gospel*. Some of these problems are unique to Japan. Others, such as environmental pollution, can be said to pose a threat to people everywhere, as I had occasion to recall in this year's World Day of Peace Message. When the Church works for a solution to human problems, "she is not going beyond her mission. She is however concerned that this mission should not be absorbed by preoccupations concerning the temporal order or reduced to such preoccupations. Hence she takes great care to maintain clearly and firmly both the unity and distinction between evangelization and human promotion: unity,

because she seeks the good of the whole person; distinction, because these two tasks enter, in different ways, into her mission" (Congr. Pro Doctrina Fidei *Libertatis Conscientia*, 64).

Among the social issues faced by the Church in Japan, particular mention must be made of the *many people, especially among the young, who migrate to the cities* for economic reasons and who therefore feel a special need to be accepted and to belong within their new environment. In trying to help these people, the Church has an opportunity to demonstrate her profound solidarity with those who risk being separated from their spiritual roots. At the same time, she is able to make present the generous love of the Good Shepherd for all those who are lost and in need. By extending a Christian welcome, local parishes and Catholic groups fulfill the Lord's commandment of love of neighbor and can build up relationships that lead others to Jesus, thus inviting them to open themselves to the greatest of all gifts, the gift of faith itself. The presence of *foreign workers in Japan, many of whom are Catholics*, poses a somewhat similar challenge. The efforts which your particular Churches make on behalf of these brothers and sisters will not only be aimed at ensuring their material well-being, but will also seek to strengthen them in their faith by providing much needed spiritual assistance in difficult circumstances.

Another area of utmost importance for the life of the Church and of society is *marriage and family life*. In Japan, as elsewhere, the stability and fruitfulness of marriage are threatened by divorce and the practice of artificial contraception. Catholics who marry non-Catholics often face serious challenges to their perseverance in the faith. As Pastors, you exercise a sacred charge by confirming your people in Christian living, lest, for lack of roots, "they believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away" (*Luc. 8, 13*). Discerning the "signs of the times" requires that the Church be attentive to people and their problems, but it also demands that she be faithful to the Gospel. The Good News calls people of every time and place, including ourselves, to repentance and faith, to a change of heart, to a new way of thinking and acting in accordance with God's plan of salvation, as it was perfectly fulfilled in the Crucified and Risen Christ.

4. *The mission of evangelization* carried out by the faithful of Japan *depends in great part of the formation which they receive*. As Bishops you exercise an essential role as teachers, assisted by your *priests*. Great pastoral wisdom and charity must be developed among the clergy through a life-long commitment to prayer, reflection and study, so that they in turn can impart a more through Christian formation to the laity. As you are aware, the issue of priestly training and continuing education, so crucial for the authentic renewal of the priesthood in our day, will be the subject of the forthcoming Synod of Bishops. Continuing formation is also important for the *men and women Religious* who have long played a significant role in Japan. I rejoice with those of you whose local Churches have experienced an increase of vocations to the priesthood and religious life, and I join all of you in asking the Lord of the harvest for a still greater increase, especially in those places where vocations are lacking.

In seeking to provide for the spiritual growth of the laity, you have established the *Japan Catholic*

Formation Center. If formation is to bear fruit in the field of evangelization, it must not only match the laity's level of general education, but must also be deeply spiritual. It must touch people's minds and hearts, stir their consciences, and engage all their energies as they strive to live out the state in life to which God has called them. *When Christians come to realize that there is an unbreakable bond between their faith and daily life, they become powerful instruments of the Holy Spirit in transforming the world from within*. When the imperatives of faith are truly interiorized through communion with God in the liturgy and personal prayer, their application to life is clearly perceived as a personal responsibility. In the words of "[Evangeli*i Nuntiandi*](#)": "Evangelizing zeal must spring from true holiness of life, and, as the Second Vatican Council suggests, preaching must in its turn make the preacher grow in holiness, which is nourished by prayer and above all by love for the Eucharist" (Pauli VI [Evangeli*i Nuntiandi*](#), 76).

5. The goal of formation is to make all the baptized active shares in the Church's life and mission. As we read in "[Ad Gentes](#)": "The Church is not truly established and does not fully live, nor is a perfect sign of Christ unless there is a genuine laity existing and working alongside the hierarchy. *For the Gospel cannot become deeply rooted in the mentality, life and work of a people without the active presence of lay people*" ([Ad Gentes](#), 21).

This active involvement begins with the formation process itself, in which *lay catechists* can play an invaluable role. I urge you to make the recruitment and training of catechists a pastoral priority so that the Church in Japan will benefit from the dedication they bring to the work of evangelization. Besides the renewal of the parish - that perennially vital center of Catholic lay involvement - encouragement should also be given to founding or strengthening *associations and movements*, in as much as these have often proved to be effective channels for the formation and apostolic fervor of the laity.

I also wish to say a word about the many lay men and women involved in *Catholic education* who are especially deserving of our gratitude and encouragement. It is essential that they too see their work as a crucial part of the Church's evangelizing mission. Your numerous Catholic schools and universities, which are highly esteemed throughout Japan, can be powerful means of bearing witness to the Gospel. Of course it is not a question of imposing Catholic belief on the many non-Catholic students who attend these centers of learning. Rather it is a matter of proposing to their consciences explicitly and directly but without coercion or undue pressure, the truth of the Gospel and salvation in Christ (Cfr. Pauli VI [Evangeli*i Nuntiandi*](#), 80).

The "active presence" of the laity of which the Council speaks takes many other forms as well. As we noted earlier, it includes good example and an explicit proclamation of Christ in word and deed (Cfr. [Ad Gentes](#), 15), but it also calls for something more. If the faith of Japanese Catholics is to be reflected in the "mentality, life and work" of their nation, then they must not be afraid to take *an active role as Catholics in the building up of a more human society*. The connection between faith and life applies not only to their personal conduct; it also means that they will bring the Gospel to

bear on civic activities, on economic and political decisions, and on national and international endeavors. As followers of Christ they will want to defend and promote the spiritual and material well being of all people, especially the poor (Cfr. Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 47). The Christian vision of man created and redeemed by God, which is so richly developed in the Church's social teaching, provides the foundation as well as the inspiration for the Church in Japan to conduct a ministry of evangelization in keeping with man's earthly and transcendent vocation.

6. Dear brothers: I know that the history and culture of your ancient land presents unique challenges to the task of evangelization. I know too that the small number of Japanese Catholics in the midst of a vast population may tend to temper enthusiasm as to what can be accomplished. Like the first Apostles, who were commanded to feed a multitude with little, you too may ask the Lord "What are these among so many?" (Cfr. *Io.* 6, 9). Yet as the same Gospel shows us, despite the meagerness of the resources at the Apostles' disposal, that same small band of twelve men was eventually able to transform the world through the power of the Holy Spirit at work within them.

It is my fervent hope and prayer that as you strive with perseverance and love to build up the Church in Japan, you will ever remain "steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain" (*1 Cor.* 15, 58). To all of you I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.

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