



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS
OF THE SYRO-MALABAR CHURCH OF INDIA**

Monday, 8 January 1996

Your Eminence,

Dear Brother Bishops,

1. Today the Bishop of Rome rejoices with the Bishops of the Syro-Malabar Church, gathered around your Major Archbishop, Cardinal Antony Padiyara, *for the celebration of your Synod meeting*. I welcome each one of you with the prayer of the Apostle Paul: "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (*Rom.* 1-7). I have followed the preparation of this Synod with fraternal and pastoral interest, conscious that the Petrine ministry constitutes a "permanent and visible source and foundation of unity of faith and fellowship" (*Lumen Gentium*, 18). In the Communion of Saints, I make prayerful remembrance of the late Archbishop Mar Abraham Kattumana who devoted his best energies to serving the Church, and the Syro-Malabar Church in particular, sparing no pains until the very last. I cherish a vivid memory of our meeting a few hours before his death, as sudden as it was unexpected.

2. *The Syro-Malabar Church*, born into the faith from the preaching of the Apostle Thomas, *is one of the ecclesial families in which the rich variety of the Christian East is articulated*. The East Syrian tradition was distinguished for the preservation of the Christian faith, sometimes at the price of relentless persecution, for the wealth of its monastic life, for its schools and academies where Christian doctrine was explained and sung with marvellous inspiration, as well as for a missionary zeal which brought the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ all the way to your native India, and even to distant China. For many centuries you lived this ecclesial heritage with pride and enthusiasm, enriching it with specific and original aspects of your own culture and sensitivity.

When other Christians from the West reached your lands, you gave them generous hospitality. For you, they represented a new openness to the Church's universality. At the same time, however, a lack of understanding of your cultural and religious heritage caused much suffering and inflicted a wound which has only been partially healed, and which today still requires a very high degree of *holiness and wisdom on the part of the Pastors of the Church, chiefly responsible for building peace and fellowship among all Christ's followers.*

3. After the reconstitution at the beginning of this century of a hierarchy formed by Pastors from your own lands, the Syro-Malabar Church set out with determination to fulfil its role as a part of the heritage of the Christian East, on which I recently reflected in my Apostolic Letter «[Orientale Lumen](#)». Recognition of your Church's achievements led me, in December 1992, to consider that the time was ripe to raise your Church to the rank of a Major Archepiscopal Church. That act was meant as *an expression of gratitude for what you are and for your commitment to grow still further in fidelity to the Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have all received reconciliation (Cfr. Rom. 5, 11).* I have desired to be particularly close to you during these years. *As the one who "presides over the whole assembly of charity" ([Lumen Gentium](#), 13),* my affectionate attention towards you has the sole purpose of helping you to take the steps needed to overcome the difficulties of the present.

4. The Synodal structure of the Eastern Churches is a particularly eloquent way of living and manifesting the mystery of the Church as communion. Communion is a gift of the Holy Spirit; it is participation in the life of the Trinity. It therefore has to be the fruit of prayer, and requires great effort. It is built up day after day. To leave some-one behind on the way is a failure for all. To walk together in step is a victory for all, and a victory for faith and love. *The Bishop of Rome does not wish to leave you alone on this path. He wants to be a help, a bridge, a means of communion.* He will continue to walk each step with you, not in order to deny you your just autonomy, but to fulfil to the utmost the ministry which Christ entrusted to Peter: to strengthen the brethren and to confirm them in faith and communion (Cfr. *Luc. 22, 32*).

This Synod thus marks *an important though not a definitive stage in the process of your Church's growth towards ever greater union and peace, towards the sharing of a common journey.* In the not too distant future I shall ask you to return here to Rome, to share the fruit of your work with the Pope, to evaluate together the path undertaken.

5. During the Synod you will give careful attention to many fundamental questions, including the place of the Liturgy in the education of the faithful, especially in the training of future priests, and of men and women religious. With regard to your missionary commitment, the universal Church cannot but be grateful for the dedication of the many sons and daughters of the Syro-Malabar Church who are generously involved in proclaiming the Gospel, often in difficult circumstances. This they do through the Religious Institutes belonging to your own Church as well as in Latin-rite Institutes. Herein lies a further fruitful expression of ecclesial communion, as I recalled in my «

Letter to the Bishops of India », of 28 May 1987: "In [the] process of evangelization there has always existed a generous collaboration on the part of priests, religious and laity baptized in the Syro-Malabar rite, and in recent years also on the part of the Syro-Malabar Church herself in certain areas of the north. This collaboration should not be forgotten, for it points to a willingness, on the part of all concerned, to accept the age-old adage: '*Salus animarum suprema lex*'" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II, *Epistula ad Indiae Episcopos*, 2, die 28 maii 1987).

6. Also of great importance is the question of spiritual assistance to the Syro-Malabar faithful living outside the territory over which your direct jurisdiction is exercised. In my letter quoted above, I recalled how important it is to provide such assistance, in constant dialogue with the Bishops of the Latin Church in India. Great availability and reciprocal understanding are imperative. The first form of communion is *that which unites all believers in Christ, children of the one Church of Christ*. All things must be undertaken in an atmosphere of trust and common purpose, examining the various situations with objectivity and seeking to resolve them in a spirit of heartfelt collaboration. Conflicts must be banned, since no good can come except from love. Only thus will the Lord bless our efforts.

It is my intention to share these and other aspects of your pastoral work with you, gathered at the Synod, but also with each one of you individually on the occasion of your visit *ad Limina Apostolorum*. May Mary, Mother of the Church, protect and help you. May Elias Kuriakose and Alphonsa, whom I had the joy to add to the number of the *Beati* in the land which gave them birth, intercede for you and for the beloved priests, religious and laity of the Syro-Malabar Church. God bless your Synodal labours!

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