



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS OF MALAYSIA, SINGAPORE AND BRUNEI
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA VISIT"**

Monday, 1st July 1996

Dear Brother Bishops,

1. It is with great joy and fraternal affection that I greet you, *the Bishops of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei*, on your *ad limina* visit, which has brought you to Rome to venerate the Tombs of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul: "Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord" (*1 Tim.* 1, 2). As I did when I visited Singapore almost 10 years ago, so now I wish "to encourage and confirm you in faith and to deepen the bonds of faith and charity which link you with your brothers and sisters in Christ throughout the world" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Homilia in civitate Singaporensi habita*, 2, die 20 nov. 1986: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, IX, 2 (1986) 1502).

Your pilgrimage is an expression of your union with the Successor of Peter in the service of the Gospel. It is also a confession of the apostolic faith, according to which *the Church is the Bride of the Divine Redeemer and is his instrument for the salvation of all peoples*. "All are called to belong to the new People of God; indeed the whole of mankind is called to salvation by the grace of God" (Cfr. *Lumen Gentium*, 13). This is the task which has been entrusted to you as Successors of the Apostles; it is the message which you preach "in season and out of season" (*2 Tim.* 4, 2). It is the great concern of your daily ministry. Together here today, we have an opportunity to give thanks to God for all that he accomplishes through you in communicating the grace of redemption to the peoples of your part of the vast continent of Asia.

2. In your countries, the Catholic Church forms a small minority of the population; moreover, the social and cultural climate often makes evangelization and interreligious dialogue difficult. But the Lord himself says: "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the

Kingdom" (*Luc.* 12, 32). Taking our Saviour's words to heart, the particular Churches of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei show a consciousness of being heirs to this promise by proclaiming the Gospel's power to transform human hearts and by a constructive presence in the fields of education, social solidarity and health care, as well as by increasingly lending support to the Church's universal mission of evangelization.

In this you give eloquent expression to that missionary vocation which "belongs to the very nature of Christian life" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Redemptoris Missio*, 1). Your local communities, with their rich blend of ethnic and cultural diversity, are in a unique position to spread knowledge of Christ to those of your Asian brothers and sisters who still do not know him. Your communities are renewed and draw enthusiasm from their missionary outreach, since "*faith is strengthened when it is given to others*" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Redemptoris Missio*, 2). Precisely in this regard, you have a valuable contribution to make to the forthcoming Special Session for Asia of the Synod of Bishops.

3. The religious traditions of your peoples, as well as certain significant aspects of the political and social circumstances in which you live, differ widely from place to place. Nonetheless, you share many of the same spiritual joys and trials. This provides a solid basis for *a lively spirit of co-operation* within your Episcopal Conference, and for the co-ordination of diocesan and interdiocesan programmes of evangelization and catechesis. The series of meetings taking place in some of your Dioceses, at which priests, religious and members of the laity are coming together to discuss themes relevant to the life of the Church in your region is a hopeful sign of a fresh and fruitful approach. These gatherings rightly emphasize that *life in the Church is life in communion*: as members one of the other, all render mutual service according to the different gifts bestowed on each (Cfr. *Gaudium et Spes*, 32). In particular great space needs to be given to the laity, who are eager to assume their proper role. As you seek to foster ever fuller participation by all the faithful in the life of the Church, I encourage you also to make sure that the consultative bodies envisioned by the Code of Canon Law, such as presbyteral and finance councils, are in place and operating properly. These bodies will provide you and your priests with valuable assistance, and enable you to dedicate the best of your energies to what is primary, namely, the spiritual and pastoral care of those entrusted to your ministry (Cfr. *Codex Iuris Canonici*, Cann. 469. 492. 495).

4. Your *priests*, of course, remain your closest and most important co-workers in the task of teaching, sanctifying and governing the People of God. Because, as ministers of the Sacraments, they act *in persona Christi* they must be "deeply and fully immersed in the mystery of Christ" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 18). On a practical level, the daily life and ministry of the priest should be centred on the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and the other Sacraments, according to the mind and discipline of the Church. Whatever you do to encourage your priests to offer the Eucharist with devotion, to receive the grace of the sacrament of Penance frequently and to pray the Liturgy of the Hours faithfully is as it were the heart of your own ministry. The vigour of the Church's mission depends more than anything else on Bishops and priests who are *nourished by prayer* and are aflame with love for the living God (Cfr. *Congregationis pro*

Clericis *Directorium de Presbyterorum ministerio et vita*, 38-42).

At the same time you have a duty to "support and help consecrated persons" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Vita Consecrata*, 49); they too have a particular claim to your pastoral care. The presence of *men and women religious* in your local Churches ensures "an especially rich manifestation of Gospel values and a more complete expression of the Church's purpose, which is the sanctification of humanity" (*Ibid.* 32). The work of the various religious congregations is decisive in fostering the Church's mission in Asia. The example of holiness, community life, apostolate and charitable service on the part of so many consecrated men and women is a priceless witness to authentic Christian living.

5. I know that you are particularly concerned about the proper training and formation of candidates to the priesthood and the religious life, and that you are making concerted efforts to build on what has already been achieved. You count very much on the commitment and dedication of the formation teams at your three Major Seminaries, whose task it is to seek "really and truly to initiate the candidate into the sensitivity of being a shepherd, in the conscious and mature assumption of his responsibilities, in the interior habit of evaluating problems and establishing priorities and looking for solutions on the basis of honest motivations of faith and according to the theological demands inherent in pastoral work" (Eiusdem *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 58).

Your attention in this area will also have a positive influence in fostering vocations to the priesthood and the religious life. Indeed, *vocational awareness and promotion is one of the most pressing needs facing your Churches*, also in view of the diminished presence of missionaries from other parts of the world. A commitment to prayer for vocations on the part of all the faithful, both at the parish level and in individual families, will help young men and women to be open to the Lord's call to follow him more closely. "The harvest is plentiful, but labourers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest" (*Luc.* 10, 2).

6. At the same time, the *clear witness to Christian values* which the lay faithful give *in the family and in society* is vital to a dynamic and penetrating Christian presence (Cfr. *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 4). In the formation of the laity, special emphasis must be placed on a solid and systematic study of Scripture and of the Church's social teaching. Committed and *well-trained catechists* are essential: they are often the lifeline of their communities and the future of the Church depends greatly on their fidelity (Cfr. Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Redemptoris Missio*, 73). May God reward them with strength and joy!

All the various ecclesial groups and organizations present in your Dioceses need to work in accord and harmony. This is possible above all because the Liturgy, the summit towards which the Church's activity is directed, inspires the faithful to become "of one heart in love" (Cfr. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 10). Your efforts to provide for the celebration of the Mass and the Sacraments in the principal local languages should continue in a manner which will ensure the

theologically sound inculturation of the Christian message (Cfr. Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Redemptoris Missio*, 52).

7. Your local Churches are very much involved in the *education of children and young people*, an apostolate which the Church highly esteems, as her whole history testifies. In some cases public policies do not support your efforts. I can only encourage you to continue to ensure the Church's presence in this important field, as well as in the pastoral care of Catholic university students. Whatever the situation, specific programmes and initiatives aimed at the Christian training of young people should be primary concerns of the whole community; the younger generation must be nurtured and sustained in its Christian identity, for the good of the Church and of society. It is the young people of your parishes and associations who will proclaim and spread the Kingdom of God in the Third Christian Millennium (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 58). I am heartened to know that you are already actively involved in preparing your local Churches for the Great Jubilee.

8. Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei are all experiencing rapid socio-economic growth. The Church must not grow weary of pointing out what constitutes *authentic human development*, that is, a development which responds to the cultural, ethical and spiritual needs of men and women (Cfr. Eiusdem *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 33). In this way the Church will continue to be a leaven in society, lending support to initiatives which seek to protect and defend true values, especially the values of family and community solidarity, against the threat of materialism and self-centred individualism. These are matters in which the promotion of understanding and co-operation between different religious, cultural and ethnic groups takes on special significance. Continue to promote ever more genuine and effective dialogues, *both ecumenical and interreligious*. Especially important is the "dialogue of life", whereby people of different backgrounds join together in helping others in need, in bringing comfort to the suffering, in ensuring respect for the rights of minorities, refugees and immigrants. There are also many Catholics among the immigrants arriving on your shores, and I urge you to offer them the pastoral support and care they need. "As you have opportunity, do good to all people, especially those who are of the household of faith" (Cfr. *Gal.* 6, 10).

9. Dear Brother Bishops, I am fully aware of the responsibilities which the Lord has placed on you in calling you to the episcopacy, and I promise you the support of my prayers. I wish you to take away from our meetings a renewed sense of the communion which, as Successors of the Apostles, we share in the service of Christ and his Kingdom. May Mary, Queen of Peace and Star of Evangelization, guide you and protect the Church in Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei. Upon you and upon the clergy, religious and lay faithful of your region, whom, with God's help I hope to be able to visit again at some time in the future, I invoke an abundance of divine graces, and to all I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.

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