



The Holy See

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

Friday, 5 July 1996

Dear Brother Bishops,

1. With warm affection I welcome you, the *Bishops of Myanmar*, on the occasion of your *ad limina* visit. "May our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father ... comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word" (2 *Thess.* 2, 16). You have come to venerate the tombs of the Princes of the Apostles and to meet the Bishop of Rome who "presides over the universal communion of charity" (Cfr. S. Ignatii Antiocheni *Ad Romanos*, prooemium). Our fraternal encounter manifests the collegial spirit which unites Bishops with the Successor of Peter, with one another and with the whole People of God throughout the earth. Our meeting therefore gives expression to the profound mystery of the *Church as a communion* - that blessed fellowship with the Most Holy Trinity - the sharing in the life of the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit (Cfr. *Io* 1, 1-3) which is both the path and the goal of her pilgrim journey. I encourage the Church in Myanmar to have a lively sense of the supernatural *koinonia* of grace which transcends all human divisions and enables the various ministries and charisms to converge and work together in building up the "temple of the living God" (2*Cor* 6, 16).

2. Your presence is an occasion for us to rejoice together and to give thanks to God for the way in which the seed of faith grows and matures in your communities, which, although they form a "little flock", are full of signs of hope. Many of your Dioceses are experiencing a marked growth in vocations to the ministerial priesthood and consecrated life. This is a marvellous sign of ecclesial vitality and maturity, just as it brings with it important responsibilities. As the *ones primarily charged with the training of your priests*, you must build on what has been done so far, ensuring that candidates follow a solid and complete programme of priestly formation. You must be satisfied that the time spent in formation is leading them to the human, psychological, moral, intellectual

and spiritual maturity which will make them fit for the presbyterate. In a special way I encourage you always to appoint to this work priests who bear visible, joyful testimony to the value and virtues of the priesthood, lived as a welcome grace from God and sustained by fervent prayer, self-sacrifice and pastoral charity. The Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation "[Pastores Dabo Vobis](#)", like a Magna Charta of priestly life and formation, offers in synthesis the Church's wisdom and experience in this field. When you return to your Dioceses, assure your priests that you and I acknowledge their work and thank them once again. Urge them to continue joyfully on their chosen path, for the same God who called them remains with them every day of their lives (Cfr. Ioannis Pauli PP. II [Pastores Dabo Vobis](#), 4).

3. In the light of a wisdom acquired down the centuries under the guidance of the Spirit of Truth (Cfr. *Io.* 14, 26), Church law requires that certain *structures of communion* be established in every particular Church. Prominent among these structures is the presbyteral council, which serves as the Bishop's senate and assists him in the governance of the Diocese according to the norm of law for the pastoral welfare of the people entrusted to his care (*Codex Iuris Canonici*, can. 495 § 1). Also important are the diocesan finance council for the management of temporal affairs (*Ibid.* can. 492 § 1), and the pastoral council, which can be of great help in organizing the ecclesial activities of all the various components of the Diocese (Cfr. *ibid.* can. 511). Continue your efforts to establish and make ever more effective these means of communion and co-operation which enable each particular Church to be truly and practically united in the praise of God and service of neighbour.

4. You are the builders of communion, and your pastoral care embraces all the Church's members: the clergy, the men and women religious, and the laity. Each state of life expresses in its own way one or other aspect of the mystery of Christ (Cfr. Ioannis Pauli PP. II [Vita Consecrata](#), 32). *The consecrated life*, because it entails a closer following of Christ's own way of life, is an especially rich manifestation of Gospel values. It testifies to the fact that the world cannot be transfigured and offered to God without the spirit of the Beatitudes (Cfr. *ibid.* 33). Make it one of your principal pastoral concerns to help the members of religious communities acquire that solid preparation which will enable them to "live consistently and fully their freely assumed commitments" (*Ibid.* 103).

5. Your people's fidelity to prayer and their fervent sacramental life are treasures to be carefully guarded and intensified. For the fulfilment of their mission the lay faithful need to be interiorly sustained by the power of the Spirit poured out upon the Church through the wounds of the Crucified and Risen Lord. From the pierced heart the Redeemer flow the living waters of grace (Cfr. *Io.* 7, 38), which will strengthen the Catholics of Myanmar in building up the mystical body of Christ, even in difficult situations. Those who "walk by the Spirit" (*Gal.* 5, 16) are impelled by love to be conformed to the Son (Cfr. *Rom.* 8, 29) and to love others as he has loved them (Cfr. *Io.* 15, 12). Authentic spirituality always leads to love others, and to a firm commitment to transform the world - the home, neighbourhood, workplace and nation - in the light of faith. *Opus orationis*

iustitia: the Christian's hunger and thirst for justice is the fruit of prayerful union with God.

I am glad to know that, even without an abundance of material resources, the laity in your Dioceses generously devote themselves to the *spiritual and corporal works of mercy*, responding especially to the needs of orphans, the poor and the neglected. The establishment of Karuna Myanmar [*Caritas*] will give *initiatives of solidarity* a structure through which the various groups can work together more effectively for the well-being of all.

As you have had occasion to tell me, the catechists in your Dioceses are "*irreplaceable evangelizers*" and a pillar of strength for your Christian communities (Cfr. Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Redemptoris Missio*, 73). To each of them I send a special greeting in the Lord! The first witness of every catechist - and the one which you must constantly encourage - is a life of holiness shown by steadfast faith, unflinching hope and burning charity. These are the "words" which draw people to the Gospel. In order that the specific ecclesial mission of your catechists may be ever more fruitful, they should be chosen according to precise, realistic and verifiable criteria (Cfr. Congregationis pro Gentium Evangelizatione *Guide for Catechists*, 18) and they must be ensured an *intense spiritual, doctrinal and pastoral formation*.

6. The Church in Myanmar, like its Sister Churches throughout the world, is "missionary by its very nature, and is both evangelized and evangelizing" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Redemptoris Missio*, 49). No part of the People of God can feel exempt from the task proclaiming the Good News to the whole of creation (Cfr. *Marc.* 16, 15). Through the witness of priests, religious and lay catechists, evangelization is continuing to make progress in the most remote areas of your country. Recent plans for the establishment of a Missionary Society, Associations of lay missionaries, and evangelizing efforts related to the Great Jubilee are eloquent signs of that *missionary spirit* which is the guarantee that your hearts beat in unison with the needs of the universal Church (Cfr. *Act.* 12, 24).

You speak of improving ecumenical contacts, and especially of *common prayer* with those not in full communion with the Catholic Church. We must hope that this practice - which in fact is "the soul of the whole ecumenical movement" (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, 8) will increasingly lead Christians in Myanmar to "join together in taking a stand in the name of Christ on important problems concerning man's calling and on freedom, justice, peace, and the future of the world" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Ut Unum Sint*, 43).

Likewise, *interreligious dialogue* is a delicate but indispensable task of your particular Churches. Indeed, as in the rest of Asia, in Myanmar. "the issue of the encounter of Christianity with ancient local cultures and religions is a pressing one" (Eiusdem *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 38). In this you are guided by a profound *esteem for the followers of other religious traditions* - the pre-requisite for all dialogue. An attitude of respect avoids both a false irenicism rooted in religious indifferentism and a militant fundamentalism which fails to recognize the individual and personal

nature of the quest to know the truth and live according to it. On the immediate and practical level, interreligious dialogue involves the desire to overcome divisiveness and to promote harmony through mutual respect, selflessness and compassionate service of others without distinction. In a special way Myanmar's ancient *monastic tradition* can form a spiritual bridge of fellowship which will stimulate *dialogue between Buddhists and Christians*. Lives dedicated to prayer and asceticism strongly remind us that the heart's deepest stirrings are satisfied not by the materialism of "having" things but by the communion of "being" with God. Would it not be *a great blessing* for the Church in Myanmar *to have an Institute of Contemplative Life*, a community which would "bear glorious witness among non-Christians to the majesty and love of God"? (*Ad Gentes*, 40) The emergence of the monastic life in a young Church is a sign that the Gospel has been authentically and fully implanted.

7. I also wish to encourage your efforts to make the Catholic faithful ever more aware of the part they can play in your country's *development*, a development which should embody respect for human rights and for cultural and religious values, as well as the promotion of justice and the service of the common good. The Church's social teaching rests on the concept of "the *dignity of the person* revealed in all its fullness in the mystery of the Incarnate Word" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Centesimus Annus*, 47). It rests on the firm conviction that the unshakable foundation and solid guarantee of a just and peaceful human coexistence are the universal moral norms grounded in creation and written in the human heart (Cfr. *Eiusdem Veritatis Splendor*, 96). The safeguarding and promotion of human dignity and inalienable human rights, and in particular the right to religious freedom, is a task which the Church must never neglect.

8. Dear Brothers: as the Great Jubilee draws ever nearer, we must pray that the Church in Myanmar will be blessed with the special fruits of that anniversary. In your midst there are already many hopeful signs for the future of Christianity (Cfr. *Eiusdem Redemptoris Missio*, 86), a future which God is preparing through the zeal and faithfulness with which you carry out your episcopal ministry. I wish once more to assure you of my fraternal support, and I pray that the *ministerium Petrinum* which the Lord has entrusted to me for the good of his flock (Cfr. *Io.* 21, 15-17) will serve to strengthen you in the apostolic faith (Cfr. *Luc.* 22, 32). May the Blessed Virgin Mary intercede for the whole Family of God in Myanmar, that it may continue with courage and joy to "proclaim the mystery of the Gospel" (*Eph.* 6, 19). With this prayer I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing to you and to the priests, consecrated men and women, and lay faithful: "Peace be to all of you who are in Christ" (1 *Petr.* 5, 14).

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