



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE EIGHTH MEETING
OF THE POST-SYNODAL COUNCIL OF THE GENERAL SECRETARIAT
OF THE SPECIAL ASSEMBLY FOR ASIA
OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS**

Friday, 19 November 2004

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

1. "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom 1: 7). With the Apostle Paul's words, I greet you all, members of the Post-Synodal Council of the General Secretariat of the Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops.

Since your Council was established and until the end of the Special Assembly, your Council's collaboration has proved invaluable, not only in the drafting of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* but also in the evaluation of its application on the Asian Continent. This task inevitably requires a fruitful dialogue with the "multiethnic, multireligious and multicultural situation of Asia, where Christianity is still too often seen as foreign" (n. 21).

2. The biblical reference in the Synod theme is particularly apt for Asia: "*I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly*" (Jn 10: 10). The high percentage of young people registered on the Continent is a reason for optimism for the future and a challenge for the present: a reason for optimism because the new generations, full of promise, are prepared to dedicate themselves totally to a cause; a challenge, because unrealized dreams can give rise to disappointment and those who foster them can easily be taken advantage of by the promoters of extremist ideologies.

Moreover, the Church wants to contribute to the cause of peace in Asia, where various conflicts and terrorism are causing the loss of many human lives. During the Special Assembly, the Synod Fathers looked with apprehension at the Holy Land, "the heart of Christianity" beloved to all the

children of Abraham. Unfortunately, in recent years, the hotbeds of war have spread so that it is urgently necessary to build peace, a far from easy undertaking that requires the contribution of all people of good will.

3. If the proclamation of the Gospel in Asia is to put down deep roots, all believers in Christ must imbue every aspect of life with their faith, imitating the Asian saints and martyrs who gave the Catholic faith the supreme witness of blood. It is necessary, especially where Christian faithful suffer and are not free to profess their faith, to proclaim the Kingdom of God with a "silent witness of life" (*Ecclesia in Asia*, n. 23), carrying the cross and following in the footsteps of the suffering and crucified Christ, patiently waiting for the day of full religious freedom to come.

4. In addition, the celebration of the Synod sheds light on the fact that dialogue is a "characteristic mode of the Church's life in Asia" (*ibid.*, n. 3). The spirit of dialogue at the Synod Assembly, which enlivened relations between the youngest Churches and those whose origins date back to the Apostles, is also the right approach to take, with patience and courage, in regard to the other Christian communities. Despite the obstacles, dialogue must progress if the Church is to be faithful to the mandate entrusted to it by Christ to preach the Gospel in its entirety to all nations (cf. Mt 28: 19-20), ever docile to the action of the Holy Spirit who is "the prime agent of the inculturation of the Christian faith in Asia. The same Holy Spirit who leads us into the whole truth makes possible a fruitful dialogue with the cultural and religious values of different peoples, among whom he is present in some measure..." (*Ecclesia in Asia*, n. 21).

5. The fact that the Church in Asia is a "little flock" (Lk 12: 32) must not lead to discouragement, since the effectiveness of evangelization does not depend on numbers. After Pentecost, the Apostles and a limited number of disciples were sent out to preach the Gospel to the whole world (cf. Acts 2: 1 ff.). Through the parables of the yeast (cf. Mt 13: 33) and of the mustard seed (cf. Lk 13: 19; 17: 6), Jesus himself teaches that what is small and hidden to human eyes, thanks to God's almighty intervention, can obtain un hoped for results. Faith in divine Providence, therefore, must constantly inspire the missionary action of the Church in Asia, the Continent of hope.

May Christians in Asia continue to follow Christ faithfully; may they continue, with the greatest possible dedication, to spread the gift of his peace and love.

May the Virgin Mary, Mother of Asia, watch over them all and obtain peace for every Nation on that beloved Continent. I assure you of my prayers and to all of you present here I cordially impart my Blessing, which I gladly extend to all the Bishops, priests, consecrated persons and lay faithful of the Church in Asia.