



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS OF SRI LANKA ON THEIR
"AD LIMINA APOSTOLORUM" VISIT**

Thursday, 5 July 1984

Dear Brothers in our Lord Jesus Christ,

1. It is with deep pastoral interest and joy that I welcome you today, the Bishops of Sri Lanka. You have communicated to me the loyalty and affection of your people, and I reciprocate assuring you and them of *my love in Christ Jesus*. In you I embrace all the individuals and communities that make up the Church in your land. In this important meeting of ours there is summarized the whole religious history of your people, from the beginning, from the time of the first evangelizers. I am thinking also of the great contribution of the *Venerable Joseph Vaz* who came to your shores just three centuries ago. With you I revere the memory of this apostle and wait in expectation with you for the definitive judgment of the Church in regard to his outstanding holiness. And with you I give thanks for all the other generous missionaries who have lived and died so "that the word of the Lord may speed on and triumph" (2 *Thess.* 3, 1). With you I honour the Gospel that they handed down and the harvest that they sowed in that good ground which is the "Pearl of the Orient".

At this moment we offer to God all the vicissitudes of your history, the trials and tribulations, the joys and sufferings that your people have experienced and are still experiencing in your multiethnic and multi-religious society. And we pray that this offering will become for the people a renewal of courage and a *proclamation of hope*.

2. The President of your Episcopal Conference has made reference to "the cost of discipleship", what it means in effect to follow Jesus, the Incarnate Word of God, to embrace his Gospel, to profess the Catholic faith, to live lives worthy of the Kingdom of heaven. On this occasion, in the name of the universal Church, I thank God for *the discipleship that has been lived in Sri Lanka*. I thank him for the vitality that exists in the Church in your country, for the graces that have formed your Christian families, sustained your priests and religious, and motivated the generosity of seminarians, catechists and other dedicated lay workers for the Gospel.

3. This "ad Limina" visit gives me the opportunity to express my support for *your own apostolic endeavours* and for the

work that you do to promote a lasting peace based on justice and equity for all. I express to you my solidarity in your efforts to proclaim *the Church's message concerning human dignity* and the rights of all individuals, as well as the rights of communities with their cultural and linguistic patrimony.

You have correctly spoken of the right to one's religion, the principle of subsidiarity, the vital need for employment, and the role of representative democracy in effectively securing the rights of all. The universal Church is with you as you strive to promote *the unity of your people*, calling them to reject prejudices, wherever they may be found, condemning violence, and promoting peace and the conditions that lead to peace. Of great importance is *every effort aimed at easing ethnic tension*.

These considerations and others are among the reflections in your joint Pastoral Letter of last Pentecost. This document is an example of that concerted pastoral action entrusted to the Holy Spirit which manifests the unity of the Episcopal Conference – a good to be very highly esteemed and constantly perfected.

4. Your contribution to the life of the Church is concretized every day in the exercise of your *sacred mission of teaching* the truths of faith. This is done by you personally and directly, as well as together with your priests, and through your religious, your catechists, and the limited school structures at your disposal. The message that you proclaim not only has a religious content, but also constitutes a contribution to serene civil life. The peace, the justice, the respect for man that are so much a part of the Church's proclamation also become acts of patriotism on the part of those who embrace them, and they contribute to the overall well-being of Sri Lankan society.

Your pastoral solicitude calls you to join forces with all your brethren in facing *common challenges*, some of which are problems of great magnitude, such as *drugs and social disorders*. In proclaiming Jesus Christ and his Beatitudes to all who freely choose to listen to your words, your ministry is likewise exercised in cultivating *fraternal love at all levels of society*, in reinforcing the concept of *generous service to those in need* and in promoting *universal respect for the human person*. The very fabric of your society calls for a special commitment on your part to *dialogue with the various religious bodies* that make it up. In doing this you will indeed be faithful to the pastoral insights of the Second Vatican Council. At the basis of all dialogue and collaboration is the principle summarized in "*Nostra Aetate*": "For all peoples comprise a single community and have a single origin, since God made the whole human race dwell over the face of the earth. One also is their final goal" (*Nostra Aetate*, 1).

5. And as Bishops your ministry reaches its culmination in the *sacramental proclamation of reconciliation* according to the divine order restored by the Paschal Mystery, through the offering of the Eucharistic Sacrifice, which is the *most effective source of unity and peace*. In this unity, symbolized and effected by the Eucharist, you find your *own identity as Bishops of the Church*, Pastors of God's people and Servants of the Gospel. The Paschal Mystery passes through the Eucharist and is translated to the world in terms of hope.

6. Continue, venerable and dear Brothers, to proclaim amidst all the problems and difficulties *the hope of the Gospel*, made incarnate according to the expression of Saint Paul, in "Christ Jesus our hope" (*1 Tim. 1, 1*).

Dear Brothers: as Pastors united among yourselves, united with me and with the universal Church continue to exemplify

the hope of your calling, bearing witness to it as did the Apostle to the Gentiles who said: "For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, especially those who believe" (*Ibid.* 4, 10).

With *this message of hope* I ask you to take my greetings back to all the faithful of your local Churches, particularly to those who suffer. My special blessing goes to all who collaborate with you in the Gospel. Please assure Cardinal Cooray of my faithful and affectionate remembrance in the Lord.

And upon all of you I invoke the joy and strength of our Lord Jesus Christ, commending you and the whole Church in your land to the maternal protection of her whom you acknowledge and venerate as *Our Lady of Lanka*. May she sustain you all in hope and love!

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