



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS AND MEMBERS OF THE
REGIONAL EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE OF CHINA**

Tuesday 2 February, 1988

*To my Venerable Brothers
the members of the Regional Episcopal Conference of China
and the participants in the Symposium on Evangelization*

After four years of intense preparation, you are engaged in a Symposium on Evangelization which constitutes an important landmark in the history of your local Churches. The preparation of this event has already produced abundant fruits of Christian life among your people, including the establishment of many prayer and study groups, the spiritual renewal of parishes and religious communities, the training of the laity in pastoral and missionary activities, the organization and training of catechumens, the apostolate among students, conferences and seminars on evangelization, and many others.

As the Symposium itself comes to an end, there begins the even more important stage of implementing its resolutions and directives. At this special time I wish to be spiritually present among you, to greet you in the Lord Jesus Christ and to encourage you in your generous and committed response, in the strength of the Holy Spirit, to the will of the Father for the Church entrusted to your ministry.

Your Symposium has a double purpose: one pastoral or *ad intra*, and the other missionary or *ad extra*. Both of these aspects are intimately connected. The task before you is to establish Christian communities full of faith, hope and love, dedicated to prayer, living in the joy and peace of God's family, holding their members together and attracting others to the message of salvation which you clearly and courageously proclaim to those near and far. In order to reach this pastoral goal, your

Symposium has directed its attention to many significant aspects of the life of your communities, seeking a spiritual and organizational renewal of those forces already at work among you, and fostering the emergence of new pastoral programmes and energies which are designed, among other goals, to sanctify the family and consolidate the local Church in its union with the universal Church.

The long-range goal of your Symposium is none other than to imbue Chinese society with Gospel values and to bring Christ's salvation to many more of your own people.

The Church everywhere is at the service of the human person. She seeks to express her respect and love for the human family through generous solidarity with every individual and group. No one can be excluded from the love that "has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us" (*Rom. 5, 5*). Her loving service is directed to the whole person, body and soul, and to every person and group, without discrimination of frontiers.

Alongside the ministry of Bishops and priests within the ecclesial community, your Symposium has rightly given attention to the mission and responsibility of the Laity in the Church and the world, which was the theme of the Synod of Bishops held in October of last year. The laity have their own specific and active part to play in evangelization. By giving authentic witness to evangelical values they enable the truth of the Gospel to penetrate into every corner of society, to every profession and trade, to all kinds of people. Christians are becoming more and more aware that precisely through their faith they are enabled to offer a rich and effective service to the society in which they live. As the Second Vatican Council teaches, "they should acknowledge themselves as members of the group in which they live, and through the various undertakings and affairs of human life they should share in their social and cultural life" (*Ad Gentes*, 11).

In your case it is a matter of making Christ known and of "incarnating" the Gospel message and the Church in Chinese culture, one of the richest cradles of intellectual and moral values in the history of mankind. In this context a properly inculturated liturgy becomes the visible sign and expression of the dialogue between faith and culture traditions. Your local Church is called to be both Catholic and authentically Chinese in its Liturgy, which is "the outstanding means by which the faithful can express in their lives and manifest to others the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true Church" (*Sacrosantum Concilium*, 2).

By comparison with these needs which bear upon your ecclesial responsibility, you are conscious of your limits both as individuals and as members of your local Church. You may be tempted to hesitate. How often, though, do we read in the Gospels the Lord's injunction to "fear not"? It is his presence and his strength which give us courage to go forward and to bear witness.

Before you lies the great Chinese family. The renowned Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci and his first companions used to say: "We have become Chinese in order to win the Chinese for Christ".

But you are already Chinese and as such you are the natural evangelizers of the great Chinese family for which you are the privileged witnesses to the Christian message. Moreover, through your own living experience you show that to accept Christ and his Gospel in no way means to abandon one's own culture or to be less loyal in regard to one's own nation. For you a major task is to pray for all your brothers and sisters in the Faith that, after all the obstacles have been removed, unity may be fully expressed, in communion with Peter whom the Lord himself instituted as "a permanent and visible source and foundation of unity of faith and fellowship" (*Lumen Gentium*, 18).

With prayerful trust in Mary, Mother of the Church, you too, in a way that is special to you, are called to hear and fulfil the command of the Risen Lord: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and look, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (*Matth.* 28, 19-20).

Your present Symposium on Evangelization derives, ultimately, from that command. What it requires of you and of your local Churches is inseparably linked to the Lord's promise. He is with you. In him lie your trust and your strength! May the whole Catholic community of Taiwan therefore be comforted, encouraged and strengthened by the celebration of this Assembly.

As a token of my fraternal and spiritual participation, I gladly impart my special Apostolic Blessing to you all.

From the Vatican, 2 February 1988.

IOANNES PAULUS PP. II

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