



The Holy See

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

Friday, 7 July 1989

Dear Brothers in our Lord Jesus Christ,

1. I am pleased to welcome you, the Bishops of Sri Lanka, for this special moment of collegial communion during your *ad Limina* visit. We are gathered here in the name of Jesus, "the chief Shepherd" (*1Petr.* 5, 4) of the Church and the Lord and Saviour of us all. Through him and in the Holy Spirit we give thanks and praise to the Father for the presence of the Church in Sri Lanka. The power of the Gospel has taken root in that good ground which is the "Pearl of the Orient" and enabled the Church to grow.

The kind words which Archbishop Fernando has expressed on your behalf and in the name of all your priests, religious and faithful are deeply appreciated. Each of you represents one of the ten local Churches in Sri Lanka, and thus I wish to offer through you my affectionate greetings in Christ Jesus and to send the assurance of my prayerful remembrance to all the People of God entrusted to your pastoral care. In the words of Saint Paul I say: "May Christ dwell in your hearts through faith, and may charity be the root and foundation of your life" (*Eph.* 3, 17).

I am confident that all of you, like myself, will be strengthened by our meeting today, because we are renewing "the bonds of unity, charity and peace" (*Lumen Gentium*, 22) which bind us together as successors of the Apostles in the Episcopal College. My brothers, as "servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God" (*1Cor.* 4, 1), be comforted by the truth that you do not work alone, for you are supported by the Successor of Peter and the entire College of Bishops. I encourage each of you in your pastoral ministry and I give thanks to God for "your work of faith and labour of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ" (*1Thess.* 1, 2).

Your presence here bears witness to the truth that the Lord Jesus appointed Simon Peter as the shepherd of the whole flock (Cfr. *Jo.* 21, 15ss.) and made him the principle and foundation of the Church's unity in faith and fellowship. Our meeting enables us to renew once again Peter's profession of faith in Jesus as "the Christ the Son of the living God" (*Matth.* 16, 16).

2. In my pastoral solicitude for your local Churches, I wish to assure you of my *solidarity with the people of Sri Lanka*, who are being sorely tried by the prolonged violence, terrorism and armed conflict occurring in your country. I follow with great concern your complex situation. In the *pursuit of reconciliation* according to justice there is a need to respect the legitimate aspirations of the different groups involved. It is my fervent prayer that the various ethnic and religious components of society will strive to follow the path of dialogue and negotiation in order that a just solution will be found for the problems which obstruct lasting peace.

In the face of the continuing conflict and divisions within Sri Lanka, *God has entrusted to you "the ministry of reconciliation"* (*2Cor.* 5, 18), and indeed you have dedicated yourselves to this task. I am aware of the many clear and reflective statements which have been issued by the Episcopal Conference in recent years. I invite you to persevere in this particular mission as a sign of fervent hope, even though certain situations may give rise to discouragement on the part of many. Here you are called to be witnesses to the Paschal Mystery in the concrete circumstances of daily life, witnesses who offer the radiant light of Christian hope, especially in moments of darkness and fear.

It is above all *by Christian witness that the Church can bring about mutual respect* between different ethnic, cultural and religious groups. Seeking to influence the temporal order through her mission as the Gospel leaven (Cfr. *Matth.* 13, 33), she devotes herself to working for everything which ensures human dignity and development. She shows concern for unity by encouraging people to reject prejudice, by condemning terrorism, by seeking to improve the quality of education and health-care, and by promoting all conditions aimed at easing ethnic tension and securing peace.

3. It is with satisfaction that I recall the celebration in 1986 of the centenary of the establishment of the hierarchy in Sri Lanka, and this reminds us of a *constant theme* of the teaching of the Second Vatican Council on the episcopacy, namely, *unity*. The Council insists on the importance of the unity of the Successor of Peter and the Bishops, of Bishops with one another, of Bishops and clergy, and of Bishops with the religious and laity. Your unity is not only mirrored by your official statements but also through the coordination of your pastoral activities in each diocese and in your relations with the civil Government of each province. There is always a need for ample consultation in your joint initiatives on behalf of the Church in Sri Lanka, while at the same time you respect the pastoral authority of each Bishop in his own diocese.

4. In the fulfilment of your episcopal ministry always be mindful of the Lord's command: "Go

therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them... teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and old, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (*Ibid.* 28, 19-20). As pastors, your lives must centre around this mandate of Christ to teach everything that he commanded the Apostles.

Primarily you are called *to preach the Gospel and "to keep the Gospel for ever whole and alive within the Church"* (*Dei Verbum*, 7). This requires *on your part constant vigilance and fidelity, which are synonyms of pastoral love for your people.*

5. I wish to express my gratitude to all the priests who actively assist you in shepherding the flock of Christ entrusted to your care. *As true brothers to your priests*, seek with understanding and compassion to share their burdens and to strengthen them in their identity as ministers of the word and sacrament. Each brother priest is meant to be with you "a servant of Christ, called to be an apostle and set apart to proclaim the Gospel of God" (*Rom.* 1, 11).

As you know, it is in the *Eucharistic Sacrifice* that the priest finds the *source of his pastoral charity* (Cfr. *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 14). The Second Vatican Council teaches that "the ministry of priests originates in the Gospel message" (*Ibid.* 2), but it also goes on to say that the ministry of the word is directed towards the Eucharist, which is "the source and summit of the whole work of evangelization" (*Ibid.* 5).

Of great importance for the Church in Sri Lanka is the fact that the number of candidates for the ministerial priesthood and religious life continues to increase, thus offering much encouragement and hope for the future. I would remind you that it is the careful attention which you give to your seminarians as a true father in Christ (Cfr. *Optatam Totius*, 5) that will ensure the solid formation of your future diocesan priests. An essential condition for effective programmes of priestly formation in your minor and major seminaries is the presence of well-qualified priests to serve as spiritual directors. They can truly inspire the seminarians to live the ideals of the priesthood and help them, through God's grace, to achieve their goal. I wish to offer each of you my prayerful support in the task of priestly formation, so vital for the Church.

6. On this occasion of your *ad Limina* visit I am pleased to recall the heroic virtues and *pastoral zeal of Venerable Father Joseph Vaz*, whom many hail as the Apostle of Sri Lanka. I also acknowledge with thanks and praise to Almighty God the courageous labours of so many other missionary priests, Sisters and Brothers who have dedicated themselves over the past century to the proclamation of the Gospel and the growth of the Kingdom of God in the midst of your people.

I am filled with deep and *abiding hope for the future of missionary activity in your country.* I consider the achievements of Venerable Father Vaz a *source of inspiration* for the present and an invitation to proclaim the Gospel of salvation to the many in Sri Lanka who have not yet heard or accepted it. I praise the many initiatives that missionaries and your own local clergy, religious and

lay catechists have undertaken for the proclamation of the Gospel in your society, and I pray that the whole Church in Sri Lanka will truly be “a light for revelation to the Gentiles” (*Luc. 2, 32*).

7. It is your responsibility, my dear Brothers, to adopt those means most appropriate for evangelization in a multireligious society. The Church has a *deep respect for all non-Christian religions*, since “they carry within them the echo of thousands of years of searching for God, a quest which is incomplete but often made with great sincerity and righteousness of heart” (Pauli VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 53). It is the presence of spiritual and moral qualities in these religions which constitute a basis for mutual dialogue and peaceful coexistence. However, the Church’s commitment to dialogue with non-Christians in no way alters her essential mission of evangelization. Christian witness through *personal example must always be accompanied by the proclamation of Christ* who is the foundation of our faith, the reason of our hope, and the source of our love (Cfr. Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Allocutio ad Secretariatum pro non-Christianis, die 28 apr. 1987: Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II, X, 1* [1987] 1449).

As pastors of the local Churches in Sri Lanka, you have organized your pastoral activity in two basic directions. First, you have directed yourselves to dialogue with Buddhism and the other spiritual families in the country. In seeking to discover in these religions elements at the service of Truth, you have prepared the way for proclaiming the Good News of salvation and an eventual programme of inculturation at the service of the Gospel.

Secondly, with great pastoral solicitude you have given yourselves to your own Catholic faithful, nourishing them by word and sacrament, striving to promote their human development and caring for those most in need. You have thus exercised in their midst the role of the Good Shepherd.

8. I encourage you in your mission of proclaiming Jesus Christ and his Beatitudes to all who freely choose to listen to your words, for “to reveal Jesus Christ and his Gospel to those who do not know them has been, ever since the morning of Pentecost, the fundamental programme which the Church has taken on as received from her Founder” (Pauli VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 51).

I thank you, beloved Brothers, for your devoted service to the People of God in Sri Lanka. Entrusting you and the whole Church in your land to the maternal intercession of Mary, Our Lady of Lanka, I invoke upon you the grace and peace of her Son and cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.

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