



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS OF THE CHURCH IN TAIWAN
ON THEIR AD LIMINA VISIT**

Saturday, 15 December 1990

Dear Brother Bishops,

1. This is the third time during my Pontificate that we meet on the occasion of your *ad Limina* visit as *Pastors of the Church in Taiwan*. Your presence here is truly a cause of joy and hope. The joy stems from the vision of our heavenly Father's unfailing love made manifest in your particular Churches, of the Catholic faithful's intense communion with the Successor of Peter, "the permanent and visible source and foundation of unity of faith and fellowship" (*Lumen Gentium*, 18), of the numerous works of education, assistance and health-care carried out in your Dioceses. Hope springs from your determination to continue to bear vigorous witness of faith and communion with the universal Church in the midst of the great Chinese family, which is very close to my heart. Through you I greet the priests, religious and laity of your Dioceses: "I give thanks to God always for you because of the Grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus" (1 Cor. 1:4).

2. By seeking ever greater union and understanding among themselves, Bishops play an essential part in building up and safeguarding the communion of the universal Church, "a people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit" (Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 4). That communion is above all a spiritual reality and it stems from our sharing, through the work of the Holy Spirit, in the gifts which the Father bestows on those who believe in the Son. *It is enriched by the diversity of peoples and their various cultures, who through Baptism are incorporated into Christ*, "the light of the world, from whom we go forth, through whom we live, and towards whom our journey leads us" (*Ibid.*, 3). In union with Christ and at the service of Church unity, the Catholic community of Taiwan has a specific calling to ensure that the Gospel message of salvation will be ever more clearly proclaimed and made known *in and through the treasures of your own Chinese culture*.

The Church in your Region has a distinct history of its own. Its presence goes back to the seventeenth century, but it is in the past forty years that the Catholic community assumed its present form, born under the sign of the Cross, in the hope of the resurrection to come. In this special situation, what are the priorities of your episcopal ministry within your own society? Undoubtedly these priorities amount to two fundamental endeavors: *the spiritual renewal of your particular Churches, and the great task of evangelization and missionary expansion.*

3. These are the same goals which you set yourselves in the Symposium on Evangelization which you celebrated in February 1988, in response to the need to give fresh impulse to the missionary character of your communities. That ecclesial event ought to be a continuing point of reference for the life and activity of the priests, religious and laity of your Dioceses, and for the institutions through which the Church's mission is fulfilled. At the time of your Symposium I wrote that you had two challenges before you: one pastoral or *ad intra*, and the other missionary or *ad extra* (Cf. John Paul II, *Address to the Members of the Chinese Regional Episcopal Conference*). Now as then, these intimately connected goals are dependent on your "seeking a spiritual and organizational renewal of those forces already at work among you, and fostering the emergence of new pastoral programs and energies which are designed, among other goals, to sanctify the family and consolidate the local Church in union with the universal Church" (*Ibid.*). These objectives call for your continuing attention, and the concerted and generous effort of all involved.

The *spiritual renewal* to which the Holy Spirit called the whole People of God through the Second Vatican Council remains the principal task of each particular Church as we prepare to enter the third Christian Millennium. The Representatives of the Asian Bishops gathered at Bandung in July of this year urged the promotion in Asia of "the spirituality of those who place their complete trust in the Lord". They described this spirituality as an emphasis on renunciation and simplicity, compassion for and solidarity with all, especially with the poor. Its characteristic virtues would be *meekness and humility, a deep sense of harmony, intimate communion with God, docility to his Spirit*. As the Asian Bishops themselves indicated, such spirituality cannot but appear as a living proclamation of Jesus, the Lord and Savior, unequivocal in its meaning, powerful and far-reaching in its impact (Cf. *Final Statement*, 9. 7).

4. When Jesus Christ is known and loved, there necessarily follows *a deep sense of mission*. Individuals and groups are then more aware that they have received a divine gift which is not merely to be preserved; it must be shared (Cf. Matt. 25:26-27). When a particular Church strives to be faithful to the Lord, the conviction is clear and fully accepted that one and all must be prepared to make a defense to those who call them to account for the hope that is in them (Cf. 1 Pet. 3:15). Without exception, every follower of Christ is called to be an apostle of the word of life and of the truths and values of the kingdom. And *the first and fundamental work of the apostle is the witness of life*. The urgency of this primary form of apostolate was underlined by Pope Paul VI in "*Evangelii Nuntiandi*" when he wrote: "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses" (Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 41).

Precisely because the Catholic community of Taiwan is a *pusillus grex* it is essential that your witness be clear and courageous, so that the Christian message, so vividly expressed in the Beatitudes, may speak effectively to human hearts.

This witness is all the more imperative when pastoral activities which until now have been sustained by numerous men and women missionaries - who have accumulated great merits through their generous labors among you - depend more and more on your local clergy, religious and dedicated lay collaborators. I would encourage you to promote vocations to the priesthood and the consecrated life, in particular by giving all possible support to Christian families and by fostering the Catholic identity of the Church's schools and youth associations. The best of your efforts should also be directed to the appropriate training of future priests and religious, taking those steps that are needed to strengthen the formation programs of your seminaries and religious houses in the light of the many positive insights which have emerged during the recent Assembly of the Synod of Bishops. Where Catholics are such a small part of the entire population, foreign missionaries are still urgently needed. At the same time, the process by which many works begun by them are now being run by the local community should signify, with God's grace, an increase of vitality and an upsurge of fresh energies and new forms of commitment on your part.

5. The faithful of Taiwan must not only preserve what has already been achieved but ought also to be directed to *the proclamation of Christ to those who do not yet know him*. For these too he is "the way, and the truth, and the life" (Jn. 14:6). In your society there are many sincere followers of other religious traditions with whom it is important to engage in respectful dialogue on questions of mutual concern. These include the defense of human life and the ethical questions posed by advances in science and technology. They refer to the loss of the sense of purpose and moral commitment that follows from the secularization of society and from a consumerist style of life centered on material well-being as an end in itself. Are there not many of your compatriots who are seeking a higher meaning for their lives, who need to hear the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ? Do they not have a right to hear the truth that will make them free (Cf. Jn. 8:32)?

I wish to encourage you then and to urge you to continue along the path of *spiritual and organizational renewal* to which your Symposium gave a strong impulse and from which the Church in Taiwan and in the many overseas communities of Chinese origin will draw necessary vigor and direction. "To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his call, and may fulfil every good resolve and work of faith by his power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him" (2 Thess. 1:11-12).

6. Dear brother Bishops, your visit to the See of Peter makes me think with great affection also of *the beloved Catholic community on the Mainland*. In your presence, how can I not be deeply moved to thank God for the shining example offered by Bishops, priests, religious and lay men and women during these years? How can I not be filled with joy at the continuing and ever more frequent reports of loyal communion which come from the leaders and members of those

communities, who are always mindful of the Pope in their prayers?

These reports speak of the spreading of the Gospel through *the hidden and unceasing apostolate of many generous Catholics*, of the reopening of churches, seminaries and houses of formation for young people wishing to follow a life of consecration, and of a flourishing of activities at the service of the entire community. Together, let us praise the Lord for all that has been done with a loyal heart and in fidelity to Christ and his Church. It is he who supports, encourages and increases the witness of the faithful, and who surprises us with the never-ending gifts of his grace. I am aware that in this initial blossoming of pastoral life the help of the Churches over which you preside is not lacking. Speaking as it were in the name of the recipients of such fraternal assistance, I wish to thank you for all that you are doing for those who are one with you not only in the faith but also by origin.

At the same time there are reports that sadden my heart as Shepherd of the universal Church. The arrests of Bishops, priest and members of the laity, and various other difficulties, lead one to think that, in spite of some positive signs, there is a long way to go before the beloved Catholic community on the Mainland can give *full and open expression to its faith and to its ecclesial communion with the Successor of Peter and the Catholic Church spread throughout the world.*

7. Close to the tomb of the Apostle Peter, whom the Lord chose as guarantor of the Church's faith and unity, I feel bound to make *a strong and earnest appeal for unity*. This call is directed to you who are here present, but also to all those who have generously and loyally accepted the Word who gives life. The text from the Prophet Isaiah which we read in the Eucharistic celebration of last Sunday is an invitation to us to persevere in hope (Cf. Is. 40:3-5). It reminds us that at Christmas the glory of the Lord will be made manifest and that "he is like a shepherd feeding his flock, gathering lambs in his arms, holding them against his breast" (*Ibid.*, 40:11). The Lord expects us to cooperate in this coming by preparing a way in the wilderness (Cf. *Ibid.*, 40:3). Yes, Brothers, the unity of the Church, including that of the Catholic community on the Mainland, is the fruit of the Lord's infinite mercy. But it also requires the humble, hidden and generous contribution of all concerned. As we prepare for Christmas, let our prayer to the Father be ever more fervent, that the Divine Child's gift to the Church on the Mainland may be the gift of unity.

In our prayer, how can we forget that the path which leads to true unity is the effort of every Chinese believer on behalf of ecclesial reconciliation? A reconciliation, certainly, which must be built on the foundation of the truth of the unrenounceable principles of the Catholic faith, but which must also be sustained by understanding, goodwill, forgiveness, and the dedication of all to the cause of spreading the kingdom of God.

I urge you to be spokesmen of this desire of the Successor of Peter; be untiring and patient builders of reconciliation among the brethren on the Mainland! Tell them that the Pope bears them in his heart and that *his prayer is constantly, daily, raised for them to the Giver of all good things*

and to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

When you return to your own Dioceses, take my blessing to your brothers and sisters, and remind them of the glorious heritage that is theirs as followers of Christ and as sons and daughters of the beloved Chinese family. "May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may (you) be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, and he will do it (1 Thess. 5:23-24).

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