



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC PILGRIMAGE TO INDIA

EUCCHARISTIC CONCELEBRATION AT THE GOLF COURSE OF SHILLONG

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Calcutta

Tuesday, 4 February 1986

*"The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want...
He leads me... he refreshes my soul" .*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ,

1. With you I wish to direct my thoughts to the one who is our Eternal Father. He is the one who has brought us together. He has led us along our different paths to take our place around the twofold table which he prepares before us". The table of the word of God and of the Eucharist. Together let us thank him.

Dear Archbishop D’Rosario, dear brother bishops, dear brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ: as we gather here this morning in this beautiful setting of the hills of Meghalaya – "the abode of the clouds" – I greet you with great joy in "God who is rich in mercy". He gives me this privilege, to celebrate the Eucharist here in the midst of you who belong to so many different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, so rich in beauty, so varied in expressions.

I gladly welcome and greet the civil authorities present, as well as the distinguished representatives of the various religious traditions.

The States that comprise this region of North East India have well been called the " Seven Sisters ", thus giving expression to your sense of unity and solidarity.

2. In every culture God's works can be known. For you, God is not a mere abstract idea, he is very much a part of your life. Nature herself shows you, in her beauty, his loving presence. Out of love he reveals himself to us. If all of us can speak the one language of love, it is because God first loved us. He has revealed his love to us.

You are also aware that man at one time turned against the Creator through sin, but that God in his mercy did not abandon mankind. Rather he revealed his loving plan of salvation.

In this region of North-East India, particularly, each group has within it a long-standing tradition of God's communication with mankind through signs and symbols that have assumed a sacred character. In fact, we can picture God as our Shepherd who never abandons his sheep but goes and searches for the scattered ones to bring them all into the unity of the children of God.

The first reading of today's Liturgy speaks of this in specific terms: "God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ... and raised us up with him" .

God's self-manifestation reaches its fulness in Jesus Christ, who is the Word of the Father, the eternal Son of God made man. The whole plan of God for the human family is made known through the mystery of the Incarnation. It is in Christ that we come to a fuller knowledge of the Father, for " no one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known".⁴

3. When Jesus began his ministry among his people, he announced God's Kingdom: he revealed the Father and himself through words and actions .

As Saint Luke describes in today's Gospel, Jesus began his ministry in the synagogue at Nazareth by proclaiming that the whole of God's salvific plan for the human family was being realized in his own person: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" .

Jesus came to announce definitively that people are called to belong to God, to enter the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Jesus gave evidence that what he preached was already a reality in his person. He cured the sick, the blind, the deaf, the dumb, and the lame. He raised the dead to life and filled the hungry. He did all this to reveal God's love already at work in him.

The revelation of God's love for us reached its highest expression in Christ's passion and death: "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" . Through love Jesus entered wholly and without reserve into communion with his Father and with mankind. In

him there is the total self-communication of God and the total response of man. He has become the foundation of our peace and unity.

4. The Gospel of Jesus Christ, far from being mere words, is the expression of the loving concern that God has for us and that he concretely expressed in the words, works and person of Jesus. It was this Gospel that the Apostles went about preaching after Jesus left our visible world. They dared to do this since they had received the gift of the Holy Spirit who endowed them with fearless zeal to proclaim "that which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life... that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ" .

The preaching of this message gave birth to communities where the word continued to be proclaimed and believed in; and where faith was expressed concretely in worship and right living. Ever since, that same vision and commitment have led countless courageous priests, religious and lay apostles to go forth all over the earth to preach the Good News of salvation in Christ Jesus, braving innumerable difficulties and obstacles of every kind, even to the extent of shedding their blood.

5. Nearly a hundred years ago the Assam Mission was established and entrusted to the Society of the Divine Saviour whose missionaries laid a solid foundation for the further proclamation of the Gospel. Other enterprising Catholic missionaries, particularly those belonging to the Foreign Missionaries of Paris and of Milan, laboured in this region. We recall here the heroic deaths of Father Krick and Father Broury. Other missionaries of various Christian Churches sometimes preceded Catholics in the work of evangelization. We remember them all with gratitude for the sacrifices they have made in sowing the seed of the word of God in very trying circumstances.

The Salesians of Don Bosco, who were entrusted with the Assam Mission in 1921, have contributed in a special way to the growth of the Church in this area. We treasure with admiration the memory of dedicated men like Leo Piasecki who worked in these plains of Assam, and Constantine Vendrame who is known as the apostle of the Khasi Hills, and scores of others whose sacrifices have enshrined them in the hearts of the people of this region.

This work of evangelization is also continuing today through the untiring and zealous efforts of the diocesan clergy, whose steadily increasing numbers is a sign of the growth and maturity of your local Churches.

The development and present condition of this mission of NorthEast India is also the fruit of the active involvement of various religious congregations of men and women, to whom the Church wishes to express a debt of profound gratitude, respect and love.

What has also marked the history of your mission has been the active involvement of numerous lay men and women, especially the catechists. They have often been the ones who prepared the ground for the spread of the Gospel. In a very real way the truth and values of the Gospel have taken root in the heart and imagination of the young people of these hills.

6. When the first missionaries came to this region they encountered a great variety of peoples and cultures that were quite unfamiliar to them. Yet they zealously implanted the Gospel message into each cultural milieu. Today the proclamation continues and it is being lived out in every corner of this region, in harmonious dialogue with local tradition.

The Gospel that is preached has come to these areas not in order to dominate but to be at the service of every people. The Gospel has come in order to be incarnated in your cultures without doing violence to them. In this process Christian tradition both enriches and is in turn enriched by this contact with the many values that are preserved in the hearts of the peoples of these hills and plains.

What does the Gospel of Jesus Christ say to you? What is its message in the North-East of India?

You are filled with a deep longing to share in God's life here on earth. You have a profound aspiration for the noblest ideals of human dignity, for respect for your human rights, and for development and peace. Yet you have your share of the universal problems and frustrations that the world faces today: illiteracy, rural poverty, problems arising from rapid urbanization, the tension between the consciousness of your own cultural identity and the many dehumanizing forces at work in society.

Your own traditions and cultures are not without answers to these problems. Building on these, the Gospel, with its unique message of divine filiation, of love and solidarity, embodied in the person of Christ, reveals and makes present "the immeasurable riches" of God's grace through which we are saved. In this way your human endeavours are imbued with the wisdom and power of the same Holy Spirit who "anointed" Jesus for his messianic work. Christ is God's answer to man's highest aspiration: Christ reveals God to man and man to himself.

7. Brothers and sisters: the task ahead is still immense. Those who have embraced the saving message of the Gospel have a special duty to work for the inculturation of the Christian message in these areas. In intimate communion with the universal Church, let your local Churches take to themselves, in a wonderful exchange, the perennial values contained in the wisdom, the customs and traditions of your peoples so that "Christian life will be adapted to the mentality and character of each culture".

With pastoral hope and joy I encourage the evangelical zeal and activity of every priest, religious, catechist and lay apostle. Be united to spread the Kingdom of God in this region. I am happy to

know that you are in the middle of a novena of years of preparation for celebrating the centenary of evangelization in this region. May God abundantly bless your efforts! I appeal especially to the young: be filled with the spirit of the Gospel. Learn to love and appreciate your own culture, your language, your past history.

All of you, brothers and sisters, must become heralds of God's saving presence throughout the hills and plains of North-East India.

8. The Acts of the Apostles reminds us that the first community of Christ's disciples in Jerusalem "remained faithful to the teaching of the Apostles, to the brotherhood, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers" .

After nearly two thousand years, we who are gathered here are doing the same thing: we are united in prayer, in listening to the teaching of the Apostles and in celebrating Mass. We are gathered about the table of the word of God and of the Eucharist. And it is the same Eternal Shepherd, Jesus Christ, who brings us together.

His goodness and mercy shall follow us all the days of our life, so that at the end we may "dwell in the house of the Lord forever" .

Christ himself has promised that he will "prepare a place" for us . This "place" of man in the eternity of the Living God is the end and the goal of our earthly pilgrimage.

May the Lord Jesus Christ, who is coming to you under the appearances of bread and wine, fill your hearts with zeal for everything that ennobles man and leads him to the Father! May the Holy Spirit fill you all with courage and hope!

And may Mary, the Mother of the Church, to whom this region is dedicated, continue to be your inspiration and guide! Amen.

© Copyright 1986 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana