



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC PILGRIMAGE
OF HIS HOLINESS PAUL VI
TO WEST ASIA, OCEANIA AND AUSTRALIA

***ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER PAUL VI
TO ALL THE BISHOPS OF ASIA***

*Manila, Philippines
Saturday, 28 November 1970*

Venerable brothers: Bishops of the Philippines, Bishops of Asia.

Greetings to you all in Christ our Lord. Greetings to you, Cardinal Rufino Santos, Archbishops of this Church of Manila, host to this extraordinary assembly. To each of you, brothers, Our greeting of faith and love. For your Churches, your countries, Our good wishes full of respect, friendship and peace.

Here we are together at last. This meeting makes Us very happy. It is something new, but it corresponds to the profound nature of the Church. The Church has always been the same; it is the family of those who believe in Christ, «composed of every nation under heaven» (*Act. 2: 5*). The scene at Pentecost comes to mind and from our hearts there arises and finds expression on our lips the invocation to the Holy Spirit: «*Veni Sancte Spiritus*». To savor this moment with you, a moment that seems to Us historic and full of mystery, We have made the long journey from Rome to Manila. We have come to meet you, dear brothers, to know you better, to pay honor to this assembly of yours, to encourage your work, to sustain your resolves. You are the reason for Our presence here today and at this moment the subject of Our words. On this Our visit to your vast continent, you are, moreover, the prime object of Our love.

Even more worthy of Our immediate attention than the novelty and singularity of this meeting are, it seems to Us, the theological meaning that it manifests and the mystery that it makes present:

Christ is here.

He is here through the reality, ever repeated: a gathering in his name (*Matth.* 18: 20). He is here through the faith that makes him live in each one of us (*Eph.* 3: 17). He is here also through the coming of Our humble person, to whom, as a lowly successor of Peter, is applied in a very special way the title of Vicar of Christ. And Christ our Lord is here through the apostolic ministry entrusted to each of us (Cfr. *Lumen gentium*, 21), and through the collegial relationship that joins us together (*Ibid.*, 22). We, the successors of the Apostles and the pastors of the Church of God, are invested with the power not only of representing Christ, but also of making present on earth and in time his voice (*Luc.* 10: 16) and his saving action (*Matth.* 28: 19). Christ is here. Let us take notice of this mysterious reality, with an act of faith both conscious and strong. It is true: we firmly believe that the Lord's promise, «Behold, I am with you always, to the close of the age» (*Matth.* 28: 20), is fulfilled now, at this moment of history, in a singular and marvelous way. Christ is with us.

How is this promise fulfilled at this moment? It is fulfilled in the countenance of the Church, herself the «sign and sacrament» of Christ (Cfr. *Lumen gentium*, 1; De Lubac, *Méditation sur l'Eglise*, 157 ff.). This countenance seems here to reflect with brilliant clarity the characteristic marks of the Church: one, holy, catholic and apostolic. This last mark, apostolicity, concerns us now in a particular way. Let us think about it for a moment.

All of us meeting here are successors of the Apostles. We have received from Christ himself the mandate, the power, his Spirit to carry on and to spread his mission. We are the heirs of the Apostles; we are Christ working in history and the world; we are the ministers of his pastoral government of the Church; we are the institutional organ, entrusted with dispensing the mysteries of God (Cfr. *1 Cor.* 4 : 1; *2 Cor.* 6: 4; *Lumen gentium*, 20).

You know that the Council has clearly proclaimed this doctrine, which forms part of the divine and unchanging constitution of the Church. You know too that there have sprung up many discussions about this doctrine; not all of them are useful for confirming and expounding it, as they should, but sometimes indeed more apt to confuse the doctrine and weaken it. This seems to us a suitable occasion for restating our firm support of the doctrine of the apostolic nature of the Church. We must realize that this doctrine establishes the permanence and the authenticity of the foundation of the Church by Christ; it marks the boundaries of ecclesial communion (Cfr. *Luc.* 10: 16; 11: 23; *Unitatis redintegratio*, 2); it qualifies our persons with a sacramental character for the ministry that is entrusted to us; it makes us members of a single Apostolic College, under the leadership of Peter, establishing between us bonds of unity, love, peace, solidarity and collaboration; it vindicates the importance and the fidelity of tradition. Besides this it demonstrates the present vitality and ever-renewed youth of the Church; it explains its organic hierarchy and the vital capacity of the Mystical Body to function; it safeguards the existence and the exercise of the ministerial powers proper to the Christian priesthood, which shares in the single priesthood of Christ; it is the prime source, authorized and responsible, of missionary activity (Cfr. Journet,

L'Eglise du Verbe Incarné II, 1208, 2). The fact that it derives its authority not from «below» but from Christ does not mean that it sets up a privileged caste, but rather it makes of the Episcopate an organ for the benefit and service of all the individual churches, and of the entire Catholic Church, one which works from love, to the very point of sacrifice (Cfr. *Christus Dominus*, 6).

We remind you of all this, brothers, that your confidence may be great in Christ's assistance for you and your labors, for your sufferings and your hopes. You must be aware of your vocation, the fact of your having been chosen and of your responsibility. You must ever hear re-echoing in the depths of your souls the words of Saint Paul: «Be on your guard for yourselves and for all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you the overseers, to feed the Church of God which he bought with his own blood» (*Act. 20: 28*). Be strong, be patient. You have before you an immense field for your apostolate; its very geographical vastness and the enormous multitudes that inhabit it would suffice to fire your apostolic zeal.

Here we should cast our glance over that human panorama in which your ministry must be exercised, although we know that you have already had experience in theory and in practice. You have before you an immense field for your apostolate. It is difficult to speak of Asia as a whole since more than half of mankind lives here. One can however point to a certain network of common interests, a certain identity in the way of looking at life and a certain harmony of aspirations. Young in its peoples but rich in civilizations often thousands of years old, Asia is impelled as by an irresistible desire to occupy her rightful place in the world, and her influence is effectively increasing. The attraction to change and the desire for progress are present everywhere, and we see in them a fresh chance for the man of today.

It is certainly true that-except for certain regions such as the Philippines - the Church, in spite of a history which is already long, is represented in Asia only by small minorities. Yet who can say how much heroic devotion, as well as faith in the men of Asia, has guided from the first beginnings the destiny of the missions of this continent? Who could ever fully describe the journeyings - often, even up to our own times, painful and tragic - of a missionary apostolate upheld by only one support, that coming from on high! Therefore Our hope is great, based as it is upon the command of the Lord to go to all nations, and upon his promises conveyed in the parables of the mustard seed and the leaven in the dough (*Luc. 13: 18-20*). We shall limit Ourself to indicating a few points which seem to Us to be of capital importance for your present mission. Nothing of what We say is new to you; but We hope that you will take comfort in hearing your thoughts and intentions confirmed by Our words.

The first thing that We would propose to you is this: let us make an effort to take as our guide the teaching of the recent Ecumenical Council. This teaching sums up and ratifies the heritage of Catholic tradition and opens the way for a renewal of the Church according to the needs and possibilities of modern times. This adherence to the teachings of the Council can establish a wonderful harmony throughout the Church, and this harmony can enhance the effectiveness of our

pastoral activity and preserve us from the errors and weaknesses of the present time. This is especially true in one particular field, the field of faith. It seems to Us that the defence and the spreading of the faith must take first place in our spiritual expression, and that it must be the prime object of our pastoral care. We bishops are the teachers of the faith. We are the preachers, the promoters of instruction in the faith. This is our main task and commitment. From this duty flows everything that we do to encourage study of the faith, catechesis, knowledge and meditation of the Word of God, Catholic teaching and Catholic schools, our press, the use of social communications and ecumenical dialogue. We cannot keep silent. We must not lose the truth and unity of the faith. We must strive to make the faith the fundamental driving principle of the Christian life of our communities.

To this plea for the affirmation and the orthodoxy of the faith permit Us to add a plea for prayer. In our day we are witnessing the decline of prayer, and you know the causes of this. Yet in favour of prayer we have two great - though different - resources: the first is the liturgical reform promoted by the recent Council. The Council has not only renewed the outward form of ritual, always according to certain traditional norms, but it has also given fresh life to the sources-doctrinal, sacramental, communal and pastoral - of the Church's prayer. We must take advantage of this providential teaching, if we wish prayer always to be the living and sincere expression of the faithful and always to retain in the Church a place of honor among religious values. The second resource of prayer is the natural inclination of the Asiatic spirit. We must honor and cultivate this deep and innate religious sense, which is the hallmark of the soul of the Eastern world. We must defend the spirituality proper to these peoples and ensure that their contact with materialistic modern secular civilization does not suffocate the inner aspirations of 'this spirituality. We are certain that the Church possesses the secret of true conversation with God; and you have the duty of opening the hearts of your people to the mysterious and true Word of God and to the intense filial expression of religious dialogue to which Christ authorized us and which the Spirit gives us the power to direct to the heavenly Father.

In this regard there arises another fundamental point, which concerns not only the language of prayer and religious instruction but the genius and style of evangelization which, as the Council says, must «be adapted to the particular way of thinking and acting» of the peoples to which it is directed (Cfr. *Ad gentes*, 16-18, etc.).

If, in the past, an insufficient knowledge of the hidden riches of the various civilizations hindered the spread of the Gospel message and gave the Church a certain foreign aspect, it is for you to show that the salvation brought by Jesus Christ is offered to all, without distinction of condition, without any privileged link with one race, continent or civilization. Far from wishing to stifle «the seeds of good in men's hearts and minds or in their own rites and culture», the Gospel heals, raises and perfects them for the glory of God (Cfr. *Lumen gentium*, 17; *Ad gentes*, 22). Just as Jesus Christ shared the condition of those who were his own, so the man of Asia can be a Catholic and remain fully Asian. As We declared a year ago in Africa, if the Church must above all be Catholic, a pluralism is legitimate and even desirable in the manner of professing one common

faith in the one same Jesus Christ.

And this, brothers, is also the foundation of your particular responsibility as you continue to proclaim Jesus Christ to the men of Asia. None better than an Asian can speak to an Asian. None better than he should know how to draw from the treasures of your rich cultures the elements for the building up in Asia of a Church which will be one and catholic, founded upon the Apostles and yet different in its life styles. Should We not note, to the praise of your peoples and for the strengthening of your pastoral activity, the natural disposition of the peoples of the East for this religious mystery, which seems a prophetic sign of their call to Christian revelation?

Your individual churches would certainly lack an essential aspect of maturity if missionary vocations did not develop within them. It is for the bishops of Asia, for their priests, their religious brothers and sisters and their lay people engaged in the apostolate to be the first apostles of their Asian brothers, with the cooperation of missionaries from abroad, whose merits are so great, and whose efforts-God grant-will continue and grow, in the name of the unchangeable solidarity that is the duty of the whole Church in this sphere.

One of the aspects of the present adaptation of missionary activity, which We stressed in Our last Message for Mission Sunday, is the importance it accords to the action of development. Is not the Gospel, which is the good news preached to the poor (*Luc. 4: 18*), the source of development? The Church, conscious of human aspirations towards dignity and well-being, pained by the unjust inequalities which still exist and often become more acute between nations and within nations, while respecting the competence of States, must offer her assistance for promoting «a fuller humanism», that is to say «the full development of the whole man and of every man» (*Populorum progressio*. 42). It is a logical consequence of our Christian faith. The hierarchy of the Philippines recalled it quite recently: «Christianity and democracy have one basic principle in common: the respect for the dignity and value of the human person, the respect of those means which man requires to make himself fully human» (9th July 1970). It is in the name of this principle that the Church must support as best she can the struggle against ignorance, hunger, disease and social insecurity. Taking her place in the vanguard of social action, she must bend all her efforts to support, encourage and push forward initiatives working for the full promotion of man. Since she is the witness of human conscience and of divine love for men, she must take up the defence of the poor and the weak against every form of social injustice.

We know that much has been done by you in this regard, on the level both of study and action. We are convinced that in this way you are contributing to the maintaining of peace: «Christian faith, as well as the intimate link that should exist between the promotion of human rights and the socio-economic progress of man are the true basis for authentic and lasting peace», as the Philippine episcopate likewise declared (1st May 1970).

As We utter that word «peace» how can We fail to raise up anew our heart to implore from the

Lord that the peoples so painfully and for so long afflicted by war be able at last, in justice and in peace, to lead a happy and peaceful life!

Finally, We pray to Christ that he will grant that this journey may be for all the peoples of Asia a confirmation of the invitation offered them by him to accept his message, charged with truth and love, divinely conceived for them, for each of them, in his own language and in harmony with his own civilization, as it has been received and as it continues to be welcomed still by the people of the Philippines!

May Mary, Mother of the Word made flesh, Mother of the Apostles, preside still over this Pentecost.