



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PASTORS OF THE SYRO-MALABAR
AND SYRO-MALANKARA CHURCHES
ON THEIR «AD LIMINA» VISIT**

Thursday, 19 December 1985

Venerable and dear Brothers in our Lord Jesus Christ,

1. It is with great joy that I welcome you, Pastors of the Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankara Churches, who have come to Rome to make your quinquennial visit "ad Limina Apostolorum" and to manifest thereby the bonds of unity, charity and peace by which you are linked with one another and with the Bishop of Rome and Successor of Saint Peter, "head of the Apostles on whose firmness our Lord built his faithful Church" (Officium in festo Ss. Petri et Pauli Liturgiae Syro-Orientalis).

In your persons I greet and embrace two individual Churches, unique in character: two Churches witnessing to two ancient, distinct, yet complementary forms of Oriental Christianity; two Churches rooted in the Indian soil and adapted to the Indian way of life, living in peace and harmony with their neighbours who are overwhelmingly of another religious tradition.

It has been solemnly affirmed that the Oriental Churches, "distinguished as they are by their venerable antiquity, are bright with that tradition which comes from the Apostles through the Fathers" (*Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, 1). And we know that *you are linked to the living tradition of your Churches* and through the ecclesial reality that embodies it, notably, your liturgy, ecclesiastical discipline, and whole spiritual heritage. At the same time your ecclesial tradition forms part of the Indian reality and is inseparable from it.

My encounter with you today is marked by consciousness of the grace of full ecclesial communion, heightened by the expectation of those encounters I shall have with you and with your numerous

faithful February next during my pastoral visit to India. Meanwhile, I would ask you to convey to your priests, religious and lay people the assurance of my ardent desire to be among you and to celebrate with you the Eucharistic Liturgy.

2. It is significant that your collegial visit follows close upon the Extraordinary Session of the Synod of Bishops which was convoked in order to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Council. The intention of the Synod was to relive the Council in its atmosphere of collegiality and communion, and this for the special purpose of ensuring the constant promotion of the Council's teachings. Your presence today is characterized by the same Pentecostal grace. It affords us the possibility of a brotherly sharing of common concerns and insights.

I know that you have sought in many ways to give concrete application to the decisions of the Council which had as its principal theme the Church herself: the renewal of the Church was to proceed from a deeper and more authentic understanding of her own nature. This, in fact, is the unifying theme of all the conciliar documents.

Never before had the dignity and position, the rights and duties, of the Oriental Catholic Churches been so unequivocally stated; never before had such explicit recognition been accorded to their spiritual heritage as the heritage of Christ's universal Church: ". . . variety within the Church in no way harms her unity, but rather manifests it. For it is the mind of the Catholic Church that each individual Church or rite retain its traditions whole and entire, while adjusting its way of life to the various needs of time and place" (*Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, 2). And *the Holy See continues today to uphold and proclaim this true Catholic principle namely that the diversity of rites is an adornment of the Church and a manifestation and enhancement of her unity.*

3. Quite rightly, the process of implementation of the conciliar directives has helped the Oriental Churches of India to realize the full measure of their *commitment to the work of evangelization*. The particular Churches of the East and of the West "are of equal dignity . . . and they enjoy the same rights and are under the same obligations, even with respect to preaching the gospel to the whole world (Cfr. *Marc.* 16, 15) under the guidance of the Roman Pontiff" (*Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, 3).

The work of evangelization has been going on, at home, in the immediate neighbourhood, and abroad, whenever possible, while thousands of Oriental Christians, men and women, have been engaged in various ministries throughout India under Bishops of a different rite. Here we have a form of fruitful and zealous collaboration between the Eastern and the Western Catholic Churches that should not be forgotten.

4. The reports which you have placed at my disposal and at the disposal of my collaborators in the Apostolic See provide a clear outline of the state of your various Eparchies and of the dedicated

and diligent service of the clergy, the religious and the laity. I cannot but be impressed by the seriousness of your pastoral and missionary efforts.

Your initiative is manifested in the field of education. Special importance is given to Christian upbringing in the family and to catechesis in the parish context. It is manifested also in the programmes, offered in some Eparchies, of common theological formation of young candidates to the religious life, especially Sisters. And it is manifested in the teaching of technical skills, even the humble, domestic skills which make for happier homes and help to ward off poverty and want, often restoring a sense of personal dignity.

You are *present in the field of charitable and social assistance*, through hospitals and dispensaries, orphanages and homes for the aged, for the handicapped, for those in moral distress or who need rehabilitation: the destitute find relief, the poor are befriended and helped. And I note that you are also undertaking developmental activities in the rural areas and in the high ranges, in favour of the more backward populations.

The charity of your local Churches, of your religious communities, is expressed in multitude of ways and is offered to all without distinctions of creed, race or rite. For all this I thank God and pray that he may mould you ever more in the image of Christ, the only Son to the Father who went about doing good.

5. In fulfilling your numerous and varied tasks, it is well to remember that all the structures of the Church, all the services she renders are linked to *holiness of life* and to that zeal which only holiness can make possible and sustain for any length of time. The charity of Christians is the expression of faith, an encounter with the living God; it is knowing Christ "and the power of his Resurrection" (*Phil.* 3, 10). In proclaiming her own nature, the Church at the same time establishes her priorities: she is to be Christ like, that is, holy. To manifest this holiness of the Church is the most precious service you can render to your motherland, for holiness is a language that India understands.

I urge you then to cultivate within you the sense of the absoluteness and transcendence of God; cultivate the sense of the presence of God, and entrust yourselves to him with confidence and joy. Inculcate the value of the sacramental realities as privileged moments and means of encountering God; foster a spirituality centred on the rich liturgical life your Churches. *Do not neglect to teach prayer*, and the significance of the task of contemplation and of praise: prayer which finds its culmination in the celebration of the Eucharist. Venerate the Holy Scriptures (Cfr. *Dei Verbum*, 21-26), the Old and the New Testaments in their indivisible unity: "For the word of God is living and active" (*Hebr.* 4, 12).

It is a consolation to me, as I know it is to you, that the *causes of Beatification of the Venerable Kyriakos Elias Chavara and of the Venerable Alphonsa*, a son and a daughter of the Syro-Malabar

Church, are in their final stage and await only the solemn rite, which as Pastor of the Universal Church, I shall celebrate, God willing, during my pastoral visit to India.

6. Among the important tasks the Syro-Malabar Episcopate has been tenaciously pursuing in response to the conciliar directives and in continuation of a process of renewal begun earlier under the aegis of the Holy See has been the *revision and preparation of the series of liturgical books*. The Second Vatican Council urged that "all Eastern rite members should know and be convinced that they can and should always preserve their lawful liturgical rites and their established way of life, and that these should not be altered except by way of an appropriate and organic development" (*Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, 6). It is, therefore, particularly gratifying to me that the liturgical renewal according to the directives and spirit of the Council is proceeding at a regular pace.

I commend you, the Pastors of the Oriental Catholic Churches of India, for your efforts to ensure the *ecclesial formation of the faithful of all ages*, especially those who are called upon to exercise the catechetical ministry. For the further strengthening of your Churches your efforts in this field need to be intensified and coordinated. Special attention should be given to the formation dispensed in Minor and Major Seminaries, houses of formation and novitiates of Religious Institutes.

7. The Holy See is well aware of your *concern for the faithful of your rites who live in the various parts of India and beyond* and who are committed to the care of the local Latin rite bishops. This question was given serious consideration in the Second Vatican Council and, precisely, in the context of inter-Church relations. While urging that "provision be everywhere made for the preservation and growth of the individual Churches", the Council went on to direct that: "For this purpose, parishes and a special hierarchy should be established for each where the spiritual good of the faithful so demands" (*Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, 4). At the same time, it reaffirmed the norm that "each and every Catholic . . . should everywhere retain his proper rite, cherish it, and observe it to the best of his ability" (*Ibid.*).

This problem in India has not yet found a satisfactory solution. The Holy See desires that these faithful residing outside the Eastern rite circumscriptions be offered all the facilities of pastoral care and catechetical formation in their own tradition which the laws of the Church foresee. *The Holy See also wishes to promote the harmony of inter-Church relationships* and to further the development of a climate of mutual knowledge and esteem among clergy and laity of different racial, cultural and ritual backgrounds. I trust that the inter-ritual problems can be solved before long in a manner fully befitting the Church's maternal and pastoral solicitude. The Oriental Bishops together with their Brother Bishops of the Latin rite can always expect from the Holy See sure support, protection of legitimate rights of each of the individual Churches and sensitivity to their needs and to the common good of the whole Church.

8. My dear Brother Bishops: It is customary, when speaking of the Oriental Churches, to refer to their venerable antiquity and to the richness of their traditions. This is right and good. But in considering the Oriental Churches of India, I am equally impressed by the extraordinary youthfulness they manifest. *The universal Church needs your dynamism and your apostolic and ecclesial witness.*

Before concluding, I would ask you to convey my Apostolic Blessing to your priests, to your men and women religious, your lay collaborators, and to all the laity. My warm encouragement is addressed to you for your work in fostering vocations to the priestly and the religious life. I particularly send greetings to your three Theological Faculties, in Alwaye, Bangalore and Kottayam, as well as the Major Seminary of the Syro-Malankara Church in Trivandrum.

Together with you, venerable Brothers in the Episcopate, I thank God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who blesses you with an abundance of spiritual energy and fruitfulness, unto the praise of the glory of his grace. I commend you to the loving protection of the Most Holy Virgin Mary, Mother of our Lord Jesus Christ, and Mother of the Church, and to the patronage of your father in the Faith, Saint Thomas the Apostle. "My love be with you all in Christ Jesus" (1 Cor. 16, 24).

Copyright © Libreria Editrice Vaticana

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana