



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC PILGRIMAGE TO INDIA

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
DURING THE PRAYER MEETING
AT «ST. AUGUSTINE HIGH SCHOOL»**

Vasai (India)

Sunday, 9 February 1986

Dear Friends,

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

1. It is a great joy for me to make Vasai the first stop of my visit to the Archdiocese of Bombay. I thank you for your warm welcome and I greet you in the love of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We are gathered in the part of the present Archdiocese of Bombay where the Christian faith was first proclaimed and Christian communities were first established. Here, in this region, the reality behind the Scripture reading from the First Book of Samuel which we have just heard has been repeated. God called Samuel to his service, and Samuel replied with prompt and generous decision: "Here I am... Speak, for your servant hears" . Your forefathers in Vasai heard God's call, and they too were quick and generous in their response.

It was in Vasai that missionaries arrived in the first half of the sixteenth century, to proclaim the Gospel message of peace and reconciliation in Christ. It was from the fortress-town, whose ruins are close by, that the Franciscans and the Jesuits, the Dominicans and the Augustinians, went forth to preach the Good News to the villages and towns of Vasai. As a result of their efforts, supported and made fruitful by the Holy Spirit, your forefathers came to believe in Jesus Christ and were gathered into Christian communities, the forerunners of what was to develop, four centuries later, into the Archdiocese of Bombay.

2. I rejoice to be with you at this moment, so that together we may lift up our hearts and voices in a heartfelt hymn of thanksgiving to our heavenly Father for the saving works he has accomplished in

your midst in the course of these four centuries.

Your ancestors welcomed the Good News of Jesus Christ. They committed themselves to his Church. They remained faithful through all the stages of the Church's life in this area. They were loyal in the midst of difficulties. And the fruits of their fidelity have not been wanting. Their perseverance is the reason why the faith was transmitted from generation to generation, until it was handed on to you and is seen today in the flourishing life of the parishes of Vasai.

In the context we offer our prayer of thanksgiving to the Lord: with gratitude to him for the Christian faith which has been entrusted to you. We thank him especially for the gifts of holiness and loving service which have marked the lives of so many of the Church's sons and daughters here. Among these there stands out the memory of Saint Gonsalo Garcia, the young native Franciscan of Vasai, who was martyred together with his confreres in Japan, thus giving the highest example of what the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ has meant to the Christian people of Vasai.

It is good thing to return to the past and to think about the priceless gift of God's call to the people of this region. We need to return to that point in time when you became "a people claimed by God for his own, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light" .

3. In fact, the history of the Church in Vasai constitutes a particular unfolding of the great mystery of God's love for the human family. Through this history "the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared" . In the pilgrim journey of each local Church – in humble day-by-day things just as much as in great events, in joys as in sorrows, in peace, as in persecution – the mystery of God's eternal love is at work.

The Church lives to proclaim this "goodness" of God. You do this especially when you gather around the Eucharistic table and celebrate the saving Sacrifice of Christ until the end of time . This is precisely the announcement of joy and hope for which the world yearns, for in Jesus' Passion and Death the eternal saving love of the Father is fully revealed: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" .

Brothers and sisters of Vasai, Bombay, and all India: you are called to the sublime task of making known the "goodness and loving kindness" of God and of bearing witness to it. Here the story of the young Samuel's vocation becomes a model for every Christian. The only response worthy of God's love is a generous commitment of your lives to the service of your fellow men: "Here I am... Speak, for your servant hears" .

4. If we look around and ask how the "goodness" of God is made known today in Vasai, we are immediately struck by the vitality of your family and parish life.

Your closely-knit families, which support the personal development of their members and at the same time greatly contribute to the stability and progress of society as a whole, are a precious gift of God's love. In family life there are always difficulties and challenges. Today family life is burdened and threatened in new ways. Yet, as Christians you are aware that Christ's redeeming power makes possible an ever deeper and more intense communion, which is the foundation and soul of the community of marriage and the family .

I wish to encourage you to strengthen your family life and love. I have been told that family prayer is strong among you, and in particular the recitation of the family Rosary. Dear families of Vasai: listen to my appeal. The Pope asks you to continue to pray together. Pray together as a family, for your family and for other families. Parents: teach your children to pray with loving trust in our heavenly Father. Young couples: I ask you especially to cultivate this custom of family prayer. The stability, happiness and security of your families greatly depend on your prayerful relationship with God.

5. God's goodness and love is shown too by the pastoral and catechetical life of your parishes, in your regular reception of the laws of the Church, in your devotion to the Saints and especially to Mary, the Queen of Saints and Mother of the Church. This devotion to Mary has been a characteristic of your Christian life since the beginning, when the images of Our Lady in the churches of Remedy and Pali attracted devotees, both Christian and non-Christian, in great numbers.

Who will be surprised, then, that from such a dynamic family and parish life has flowed a steady stream of vocations to the priestly and religious life? I am very happy to note the number of young men and women whom the families and parishes of Vasai have carefully prepared and generously given to the priesthood and religious life, not only in the Archdiocese of Bombay but also in other parts of India. The Church thanks you for this, and prays that you will continue to co-operate with the Lord of the harvest so that his Church may always have suitable heralds of the Gospel.

6. I also wish to address a particular word of encouragement to the laity in what concerns their specific role and responsibility in the Church and in civil society. It is their special task to make God's goodness known in the world for the common good and to help to build society on the principles of justice and truth, freedom and love.

In the course of the last fifty years, the desire for knowledge, both secular and Christian, has led to the establishment of numerous educational institutions: a Senior College, Junior Colleges, Institutes of Education, a Technical Institute, fourteen High Schools, and a Primary School in almost every parish. Is this not something to be especially thankful for? How can we estimate in human terms the contribution that the Church is thus making to general advancement and social progress in Vasai?

I am also aware of the many co-operative endeavours undertaken especially by the laity in Vasai which have as their objective the welfare of the people and the apostolate of the Church. These co-operative ventures in the banking, agricultural, fishing, health and educational fields bear testimony to the growing maturity of the social conscience of the Christian community in Vasai. Overcoming self-interest and wishing to promote the common good, you seek to pool your human and financial resources in ways that will accrue to the benefit of Church and society. May such co-operative efforts flourish, resist every form of factionalism and every semblance of selfish interest, and truly be a work of justice in love.

May all the healthy initiatives that you take to bring about greater social justice and increased social and economic development truly promote the betterment of the poor in your respective surroundings.

7. Dear brothers and sisters: in all of these ways, in the harmony of family life, in the vitality of your parishes, and in the life of the whole' of God's people in Vasai, God's "goodness and loving kindness" is being revealed day by day. God's love constitutes a call, to which each one of you must respond in generous service of others, especially of the very poor and those whose search for peace and truth is not yet ended.

May your faith and hope in Jesus Christ inspire you to deeds of love that will build up the Church in your midst and contribute to the peace and unity of the wider community of which you are a part.

With great respect and love, I invoke God's blessings upon you: upon the Catholic community, upon all our brethren who confess with us a common faith in Jesus Christ, and upon all our brothers and sisters of other religious traditions, whom we esteem and love and who are joined with us in the bonds of fellowship and fraternal solidarity.

Peace be to you all!