



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II TO THE BISHOPS OF THE SYRO-MALABAR AND SYRO-MALANKARA CHURCHES

ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT *Saturday, 25 August 1990 Your Eminence,*

Dear Brother Bishops, 1. With deep spiritual joy I greet you, *Pastors of the Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankara Churches*, on the occasion of your visit *ad limina Apostolorum*, through which, in addition to your privileged moments of prayer at the tombs of the Princes of the Apostles, you once again bear witness to the unity, charity and peace which link you with one another and with the Roman Pontiff in the fullness of Catholic Communion. Truly it may be said that, through you, your father in the faith, Thomas, meets Peter and exchanges with him the "holy kiss" (2 Cor. 13, 12), so as to be comforted and confirmed in the service of the Gospel. In you I greet and embrace the priests and religious who collaborate with you in building up the Church, "the household of God" (1 Tim. 3, 15), whose members, while enjoying the rightful freedom of the children of God (Cfr. Rom. 8 21), are united in the bonds of faith and love. In you I also greet the faithful whom Christ "the chief Shepherd" (1 Petr. 5, 4), has entrusted to your care and for whom you are to be vigilant guides, not only by word but also by your living example (Cfr. *ibid.* 5, 3). 2. Among the tasks of your episcopal ministry you have a special responsibility for building up and safeguarding *the unity and harmony of the Church of God*. This unity must shine forth in the life of each particular Church, as well as among Bishops themselves who, as members of the Episcopal College and Successors of the Apostles, are called by Christ's command to be solicitous for the whole Church (Cfr. *Lumen Gentium*, 23). It is important to remember that "the individual Bishop is the visible principle and foundation of unity in his particular Church, fashioned after the model of the universal Church" (*Ibid.*). At the same time, the effectiveness of your Gospel witness, of your apostolic action and missionary thrust will not be compromised but enhanced by your fraternal communion and collaboration. Seek always to strengthen this unity, for this reflects deeply on the life of your faithful. Be exemplary in your personal witness and in your adherence to those directives that are offered to you with the desire and intent of building up the edifice of Christ's Church in the fullness of its catholicity. This bond of charity is manifested in many ways, but it is the Liturgy that manifests and actualizes it in an eminent way. Precisely because *liturgical actions are not private functions but celebrations of the Church*, which is the "sacrament of unity" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 26), it is necessary that all the faithful be thoroughly penetrated with the spirit and power of the Liturgy (*Ibid.* 14); and in this too you are called to be models for them. I am gratified to learn, dear Brothers, that you regularly prepare for your solemn assemblies by several days of annual retreat and common prayer. As I invoke God's blessings on all you are doing to give practical application to the bonds of ecclesial charity and union, I renew my prayer on your behalf: "May the centre of all your pastoral solicitude be the Church's unity and communion" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Epistula ad Episcopos Indiae*, die 28 maii 1987). This unity is God's gift to you and, through you, God's gift to the world, especially your Indian Motherland with its bright pattern of ethnic and cultural diversity. 3. In my memorable Apostolic Visit

to India in 1986, it was a great joy for me to inaugurate the restored Holy Liturgy or *Qurbana* of the Syro-Malabar Church and to beatify Blessed Kuriakose Elias and Blessed Alphonsa. On that occasion I was able to perceive the force of that spirit of faith which animates the Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankara Churches. This past quinquennium will also be remembered in SyroMalabar chronicles for the celebration of the centenary of the establishment of the two Apostolic Vicariates which marked the rebirth of your Apostolic Church and are the basis of your present ecclesial structure. With you I give thanks to God for the two new Eparchies of Thamarasserry and Kalyan, created in the period since your last *ad Limina* Visit.⁴ Reflecting on *the marvellous mystery of the universal Church and of the Churches or Rites which make up her variety in unity*, I cannot fail to express the earnest hope that the precious heritage with which you have been invested will be handed on with renewed fidelity and deep commitment to the rising generations that include both old and new Christians. Today more than ever, in the face of a growing secularization of life which absolutizes worldly achievement and ephemeral success, it becomes all the more necessary to underline *the originality, uniqueness and transcendence of the Christian message*. None of this can now be simply taken for granted. The faithful, under their Bishops, guidance, need to be continually enlightened, catechized, and firmly rooted in the truth that is already theirs (Cfr. *2 Petr.* 1, 12). From the Quinquennial Reports you have submitted I gather how great is your concern to maintain and intensify your rich heritage of Christian life by ensuring appropriate religious formation and by encouraging *the study of the Word of God and active participation in the Sacred Liturgy*. This contact with the always fresh sources of the Christian life enables you to meet the challenges, difficulties and opportunities of the present time and to carry on Christ's work for the salvation of mankind and of each individual person, "whole and entire, body and soul, heart and conscience, mind and will" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 3). Most warmly therefore I encourage you, as Pastors of Christ's flock, to continue along the path of authentic renewal which the Holy Spirit, through the Second Vatican Council, has marked out for the whole People of God and for the Oriental Catholic Churches in particular.⁵ I cannot fail to note with profound satisfaction, as I have done on other occasions, the grace that the Lord bestows upon the "Christians of Saint Thomas": *the blessing of numerous vocations to the priesthood, to the religious life and to other forms of consecrated life*. This is a sign that the Holy Spirit is at work among you, especially by touching the hearts of your young people and leading them to venture on the path of total self-giving and single-minded service of God's kingdom in a way of life based on the radical demands of the Gospel. These sons and daughters of the Apostle of India are involved in the Church's work, not only in your own Eparchies in Kerala and in other regions of your country, but also in Dioceses of the Latin Rite in India and abroad. Some serve the Lord within the monastic enclosure, imparting by constant prayer and sacrifice a hidden apostolic fruitfulness to Christ's Mystical Body (Cfr. *Perfectae Caritatis*, 7). Others, more numerous, are engaged in direct ministry in parishes and in mission areas, in centres of education, health-care and social activity, all manifesting in some way the unfathomable riches of that charity which is a reflection of the love that is God himself (Cfr. *1 Io.* 4, 8). The Twenty-fifth Anniversary of the *St Thomas Apostolic Seminary* which fell during this quinquennium serves to remind us of the responsibility of Bishops in the field of priestly formation. The Holy See has issued important documents on this vital question which merit particular attention on your part, including those published by the Congregation for Catholic Education on Interritual Studies, on Patristic Studies and on the Study of the Church's Social Doctrine. I am confident that you will continue to be vigilant regarding the state of priestly formation in your Seminaries and in religious houses in the areas of your jurisdiction, working with each other in a spirit of brotherly understanding and with the sole aim of serving the good of the Church. Your contribution to the forthcoming Session of the Synod of Bishops on the subject will certainly be of interest to the Church at large.⁶ The spiritual life of your communities would not be as fruitful as it is if Christian ideals were not practiced and inculcated from the earliest age in the primary social unit, *the family*, which the Second Vatican Council has called *the "domestic Church"* (Cfr. *Lumen Gentium*, 11). It is your *heritage of strong family life and*

Church-centred existence that has safeguarded and favoured the growth of your faith throughout the centuries and has permitted you to continue to shine "with that tradition which was handed down from the Apostles through the Fathers and which forms part of the divinely revealed and undivided heritage of the universal Church" (*Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, 1). Today this same grace enables you - indeed, "drives" you (Cfr. 2 Cor. 5, 14), - to cast your nets farther away from your familiar shores and to assume an ever increasing range of apostolic responsibilities within the Catholic Communion, whose centre is the Chair of Peter. Your concern to provide for the pastoral care of the faithful who have settled in other parts of the Indian sub-continent has been crowned by the establishment of the Eparchy of Kalyan which, although still in a pioneer stage, is growing vigorously thanks to the zeal of its Bishop and clergy, the support of the Bishops' Conference, the cooperation of the Latin Rite Ordinaries, and the response of the faithful themselves. I am confident that it will be your constant concern to develop *further the missionary thrust of your Churches*, acting always to uphold and strengthen harmony and cooperation between the various Rites, as a divine imperative and the only attitude worthy of your condition as Pastors.⁷ There is no doubt that the great task before the Church today is the perennial one of *proclaiming the Gospel to all mankind*. The Church is "to show forth in the world the mystery of the Lord in a faithful though shadowed way, until at the last it will be revealed in total splendour" (*Lumen Gentium*, 8). This prospect I entrust to your ecclesial conscience in the present decade of years preceding the third Christian millennium. Likewise, we should not forget that, in the present dispensation, *the Church cannot evangelize unless she herself is willing to be constantly evangelized and converted*, and to be repeatedly recalled to the significance of her vocation and mission for "the Church, embracing sinners in her bosom, is at the same time holy and always in need of being purified, and incessantly pursues the path of penance and renewal" (*Ibid*). Dear Brother Bishops of the Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankara Rites, I commend you for your dedicated efforts *in fostering the authentic traditions of your ecclesial communities*, with due pastoral concern and with attention to present-day conditions. I encourage you in promoting the apostolate of the laity and in the support you give to Religious Institutes. Be not afraid of difficulties or of the scarcity of your resources. The Lord comes to the aid of your weakness and sustains you. Persevere, for "when the Chief Shepherd is manifested you will obtain the unfading crown of glory" (1 Petr. 5, 4). May Mary, Mother of the Redeemer, intercede for you and for your beloved Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankara Churches. © Copyright 1990 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana