



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO BISHOPS OF THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE OF INDIA
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

*Consistory Hall, Papal Residence of Castel Gandolfo
Monday, 19 September 2011*

Dear Brother Bishops,

I offer you a warm fraternal welcome on the occasion of your visit *ad Limina Apostolorum*, a joyful opportunity to strengthen the bonds of communion shared between the Church in India and the See of Peter. I wish to thank the Most Reverend Vincent Concessao for his kind words offered on your behalf and in the name of those entrusted to your pastoral care. My cordial greetings also go to the priests, the men and women religious, and laity of your various Dioceses. Please assure them of my prayers and spiritual solicitude.

The most significant concrete resources of the Churches that you lead are not to be found in their buildings, schools, orphanages, convents or rectories, but in the men, women and children of the Church in India who bring the faith to life, who bear witness to the loving presence of God through lives of holiness. As part of its ancient and rich heritage, India has a long and distinguished Christian presence which has contributed to Indian society and benefited your culture in innumerable ways, enriching the lives of countless fellow citizens, not just those who are Catholic. The enormous blessing of faith in God and in his Son, Jesus Christ, to which the members of the Church bear witness in your country, motivates them to acts of selflessness, kindness, love and charity (cf. *2 Cor 5:14*). Most importantly, the Church in India proclaims its faith and love to society at large, and puts these into action through a concern for all people, in every aspect of their spiritual and material lives. Whether her members be rich or poor, old or young, male or female, of ancient Christian heritage or newly welcomed into the faith, the Church cannot but see in the faith of her members, individually and collectively, a great sign of hope for India and for its future.

In particular, the Catholic Church is the friend of the poor. Like Christ, she welcomes without exception all who approach her to hear the divine message of peace, hope and salvation. Moreover, in obedience to the Lord, she continues to do so without regard for “tribe and tongue and people and nation” (cf. *Rev* 5:9), for in Christ, we “are one body” (cf. *Rom* 12:5). It is thus imperative that the clergy, religious and catechists in your dioceses be attentive to the diverse linguistic, cultural and economic circumstances of those whom they serve.

Furthermore, if the local churches ensure that an appropriate formation is given to those who, genuinely motivated by a love of God and neighbour, wish to become Christians, they will remain faithful to Christ’s command to “make disciples of all nations” (cf. *Mt* 28:19). Even though you, dear brothers, must take into account the challenges that the missionary nature of the Church entails, you must always be prepared to spread the Kingdom of God and to walk in the footsteps of Christ, who was himself misunderstood, despised, falsely accused and who suffered for the sake of truth. Do not be deterred when such trials arise in your own ministry, and in that of your priests and religious. Our belief in the certainty of Christ’s Resurrection gives us confidence and courage to face all that may come and to press forward, building the Kingdom of God, aided as always by the grace of the sacraments and through prayerful meditation on the Scriptures. God welcomes everyone, without distinction, into union with him through the Church. So too, I pray that the Church in India will continue to welcome everyone, above all the poor, and to be an exemplary bridge between men and God.

Finally, my dear brother Bishops, I note with gratitude the various efforts the local churches in India have made in commemoration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the first [Apostolic Visit of Pope John Paul II to your country](#). During those memorable days, he had several notable encounters with leaders of other religious traditions. Manifesting his personal respect for his interlocutors, this blessed Pope gave an authentic witness to the value of interreligious dialogue. I renew the sentiments he expressed so well, “To work for the attainment and preservation of all human rights, including the basic right to worship God according to the dictates of an upright conscience and to profess that faith externally, must become ever more a subject of interreligious collaboration at all levels” (John Paul II, [Meeting with Representatives of the different religious and cultural traditions and with the youth at the Indira Gandhi Stadium](#), 2 February 1986). I encourage you, dear brothers, to carry forward the Church’s efforts to promote the well-being of Indian society through continued attention to the promotion of basic rights – rights shared by all humanity – and by inviting your fellow Christians and the followers of other religious traditions to take up the challenge of affirming the dignity of each and every human person. This dignity, expressed in respect for and promotion of the innate moral, spiritual and material rights of the person, is not merely a concession granted by any earthly authority. It is the gift of the Creator, and stems from the fact that we are created in his image and likeness. I pray that the followers of Christ in India will continue to be promoters of justice, bearers of peace, people of respectful dialogue, and lovers of the truth about God and about man.

With these thoughts, dear brother Bishops, I renew to you my sentiments of affection and esteem. I commend all of you to the intercession of Blessed Pope John Paul, who surely brings his affection for India before the throne of our heavenly Father. Assuring you of my prayers for you and for those entrusted to your pastoral care, I am pleased to impart my Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of grace and peace in the Lord.

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