



The Holy See

***LETTER OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE
PARTICIPANTS IN THE THIRD PLENARY ASSEMBLY
OF THE FEDERATION OF ASIAN BISHOPS' CONFERENCE***

*To my venerable and dear brother Bishops
meeting in the Third Plenary Assembly
of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences*

To you, brothers, and to all God's beloved in Asia, "who are called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ". In greeting you who are Pastors of local Churches in Asia, I greet also all the faithful spread throughout your vast continent, for whom you represent the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ.

It gives me immense joy to note that you have chosen for your pastoral reflections a subject of great importance and far-reaching consequences: "The Church as a community of faith in the context of Asia". This theme is an appropriate complement to your discussions in 1978 on Christian prayer as it constitutes an essential dimension of ecclesial life in Asia, and which you so aptly described as "our conscious personal communion with God our Father in Christ Jesus". This personal communion with God is indeed possible precisely because of our faith, our free acceptance of Christ and his saving word.

In endeavouring to emphasize the Church as a community of faith, you are underlining a fundamental aspect of her life and activity, one which the whole tradition of the Church has considered the beginning of salvation and the foundation and root of all justification. Dear Brothers, faith is not only the basis of our Christian life and thus the basis of every community of Christ's followers, but it is also, in the powerful expression of Saint John, "the victory that overcomes the world". Paschal faith is the fulfilment of God's will for us as taught by the same Apostle: "And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ...". This Jesus Christ whom we accept and proclaim is the one who "was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God".

Jesus Christ is truly alive in Asia: he lives by the power of God in your people who accept him in faith and who are called to live and to give witness to that faith, both as individuals and as communities. As shepherds of the flock, you are endowed with a pastoral charism that enables you, in union with the universal Church, to help your people express the one Catholic faith in the rich context of their Asian cultures. In the members of his one Body, the single Church – vitally present throughout your continent in numerous communities of faith – the undivided Christ himself wills to be and to become, ever more, Asian. But this can only be effected through the faith of the community, which in turn depends on the faithful proclamation of the Gospel and on its being authentically lived.

In speaking about the revealed mystery of the Church as a local community of faith, we realize the challenge that we have as Pastors to live “by faith in the Son of God”. It is only through faith that we can know the Jesus whom we proclaim; only through faith are we equipped to respond to that deep yearning of people, recorded in the Gospel and repeated in every generation of human history: “We wish to see Jesus”. Sharing by faith in the secrets of his divine person and knowing the mystery of his identity as Son of God and Saviour of the world, we can proceed confidently to communicate Christ and his word.

Every dimension of the ecclesial communities is influenced by the faith of their Pastors. For this reason Christ’s appeal to us to evangelise is an appeal to us to believe more firmly in him and in his word. The Church is built on the faith of the Apostles and their personal acceptance of Christ. The well-being of communities of faith in Asia depends on the faith of the Bishops of Asia and on their personal communion with the Lord.

It is only in the light of faith that the great issues of ecclesial life can be faced. It is faith that directs us in all aspects of our pastoral activity: in divine worship and sacramental life, in preaching and in catechesis, in our relationship with the priests and religious, in our ministry to the family and to all other groups, in treating the moral problems and challenges that affect our people in their daily lives. It is faith that enlightens and inspires us in our own involvement in promoting integral human development and in helping to foster the well-being of Asian society, where millions and millions of men, women and children are asking to have their human dignity reaffirmed and their hope in humanity reinforced.

For us Bishops, faith in Jesus Christ and in his word must become the driving force of our lives.

That it should also become the driving force in the lives of our people is what we desire to foster as we strive to build up the Church as a community of faith in the context of Asia.

Beloved Brothers, I am one with you in this apostolic task to which you have been called and for the accomplishment of which we have received strength from God. We shall work together in the unity of the universal Church, being assisted by the Holy Spirit. We shall work for the glory of the

Most Holy Trinity and for the good of all Asia. And in so doing, we shall know that Jesus Christ is with us, that he is in our midst.

Let us, therefore, in the words of the Letter to the Hebrews, “persevere in running the race which lies ahead: let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, who inspires and perfects our faith”. Yes, we shall run together with our eyes fixed on Jesus. And in his name – in the holy name of Jesus – I bless you all.

From the Vatican, 16 October 1982.

IOANNES PAULUS PP. II

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