



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA AND
THE SOLOMON ISLAND ON THEIR AD LIMINA VISIT**

Tuesday, 23 October 1979

Dear Brothers in Christ,

1. WITH DEEP FRATERNAL affection I welcome you to the See of Peter, and I greet you with the words of Paul: "Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ"^[1].

It is a great joy for me to embrace in you all the faithful of the two nations that you represent: Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. Through you I send greetings to every community that is found throughout the geographical expanses that you are called to traverse in the name of Christ and for the cause of his uplifting Gospel of salvation.

It is particularly satisfying to note the presence of autochthonous Bishops in your midst, knowing well that the Church's life by its nature is directed to the full flowering of the local ecclesial communities.

It is indeed a special moment in evangelization when Christ, through his Church, calls to the Episcopacy a son of the people to whom he has communicated his saving word.

And so it is right for me to render homage to all of you, and to all the missionaries who throughout generations have expended themselves to bring the Good News of Jesus Christ to the people of your vast areas. The history of that evangelization of which you are the present-day heralds is a record of God's grace infused into hearts; it is a record of the *mirabilia Dei* taking place in human history, despite multiple obstacles and setbacks.

The universal Church today expresses deep thanks for what has been accomplished for the

building up of the Kingdom of God in your regions; through me the universal Church gives expression to a debt of gratitude owed to you and your predecessors – to all who have planted the Church – for your generosity of faith and love.

2. Our meeting today has a deep meaning because it manifests the nature of Christ's Church and of the College of Bishops. Assembled with the Bishop of Rome, and through him united with all your brother Bishops throughout the world, you find a dimension of your own unity that has important consequences for your apostolate. Above all you have come to celebrate the mystery of the Church and to be confirmed by Peter in the faith of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. I am sure that this profound ecclesial dimension of our unity will continue to be a source of strength and joy for your ministry in the years ahead.

Your contacts, moreover, with the Roman Curia are useful in assisting it to render ever more effective service, in my name, to your local Churches. I am confident that by divine grace the exchanges of experiences will bear fruit in furthering worthy pastoral initiatives for the good of God's people.

But apart from every practical consideration, your meeting in Rome gives expression to the deep mystery of ecclesial solidarity, and, in particular, to the pastoral responsibility for the local Churches that belongs to the entire College of Bishops, and to its head, the Bishop of Rome. As we acknowledge and celebrate together our unity in the apostolate, we know that this unity has a supernatural effectiveness in regard to your ministry at home.

3. I would not let this opportunity pass by without extolling, amid the many achievements of the Church in your lands, the great witness of Christian love that has been given by the missionaries. This witness has been manifested for generations through personal and concerted activity in the Church, through loving attention to the material needs of the people, through educational endeavours, through medical and health care initiatives, and through a multiplicity of services freely rendered to the cause of human dignity.

Above all, this witness of love has been evidenced in a burning desire to bring the Gospel of Christ into the heart of every individual and community, to fulfil the Church's fundamental function, which is: "to direct man's gaze, to point the awareness and experience of the whole of humanity towards the mystery of God, to help all men to be familiar with the profundity of the Redemption taking place in Christ Jesus"^[2]. And may this witness of love go on for ever in Papua New Guinea and in the Solomon Islands.

4. It is evident that missionary service will be useful and necessary for the future of the apostolate in your countries. The great initial phase has been accomplished, and it remains a triumph of God's grace. But the consolidation and development of each local Church must continue.

This progress has two dimensions: Each local Church has its own identity as an individual ecclesial community, with its distinctive gifts of nature and grace, situated within the variety and unity of all God's people. Each local Church is therefore a special offering of Christ to his Father; it gives unique expression to one aspect of Christ's fullness. At the same time, each local Church is authentic precisely to the extent that it exemplifies in miniature the one holy Catholic and apostolic Church of Christ.

For the universal Church there is but one holiness and justice, and it is that which is born of truth^[3]. And this truth is the everlasting truth of God's word. For this reason, dear Brothers, we find abundant energy to continue our apostolic preaching, despite all obstacles, with great patience and love, but with great fidelity to the deposit of God's word as proclaimed by the universal Church.

The perfect identity of the local Churches is found in complete openness to the universal Church; it is nurtured by an awareness of Catholic unity.

5. In every effort which we must make to bring the Gospel to our people and into every aspect of their lives – and this is indeed our calling – we must ensure that the message which we preach remains the unchanged word of God.

Let us never fear that the challenge is too great for our people: they were redeemed by the precious blood of Christ; they are his people. Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ vindicates to himself the final responsibility for the acceptance of his word and for the growth of his Church. It is he, Jesus Christ, who will continue to give the grace to his people to meet the requirements of his word, despite all difficulties, despite all weaknesses.

And it is up to us to continue to proclaim the message of salvation in its entirety and purity, with patience, compassion and the conviction that what is impossible with man is possible with God. We ourselves are only part of one generation in salvation history, but "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and for ever"^[4]. He is indeed able to sustain us as we recognize the strength of his grace, the power of his word and the efficacy of his merits.

6. Our great strength is found in our ecclesial unity, which in turn is fostered by prayer. And it is prayer that constitutes our master programme of the apostolate: *Actiones nostras, quaesumus, Domine, aspirando praeveni et adiuvando prosequere!* Through the prayer that unites us ever more closely with Christ's design for his Church, we can plan more effectively and confidently for the future.

In this way, Brethren, devote your best efforts to those great issues that confront all of you: the question of vocations, the importance of social communications, the role of catechists, and the general promotion of the laity – not only as a practical means of sharing responsibility for the

Gospel, but as a fulfilment of the divine will to associate the laity in the Church's mission of salvation. In prayer you will find the strength and insights to continue on the path of evangelization, being confident of the power of the word of God to uplift and transform all human cultures, bringing to them the original and incomparable contribution that comes directly from Jesus Christ, who embodies the fullness of humanity.

7. I would ask you to devote special attention to fostering the holiness of Christian marriage and to proclaiming the fullness of God's design for the family. This task is indeed great: human knowledge and sensitivity will assist you, but only divine wisdom will enlighten you sufficiently for this ministry. And remember always that, by the power of Christ's word and in the unity of God's Church, you will be enabled to lead your people "in paths of righteousness for his name's sake"^[5].

8. My thoughts today go out to all your collaborators in the Gospel – to the men and women religious who assist in building up the Church by word and deed. Their reward will be immense in heaven.

In a special way I am thinking of your priests, to whom God's providence reserves such an important role in the proclamation of the Gospel. In this regard permit me to address to you the words I recently spoke to the Bishops of Ireland: "Our relationship with Jesus will be the fruitful basis of our relationship with our priests, as we strive to be their brother, father, friend and guide. In the charity of Christ we are called to listen to and to understand them; to exchange views regarding evangelization and the pastoral mission they share with us as co-workers with the Order of Bishops. For the entire Church – but especially for the priests – we must be a human sign of the love of Christ and the fidelity of the Church. Thus we sustain our priests with the Gospel message, supporting them by the certainty of the Magisterium, and fortifying them against the pressures that they must resist. By word and example we must constantly invite our priests to prayer"^[6].

9. And for all your local Churches I pray that they will enjoy peace and progress, and that they will be filled with the consolation of the Holy Spirit.

Dear Brothers in Christ: Let us go forward together, under the protection of our Blessed Mother Mary, in our common responsibility, for the glory of Christ's name, proclaiming the Good News of salvation – the "Good News of a great joy which will come to all the people". And to all your clergy, religious and laity I send my Apostolic Blessing, in the love of Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Saviour of the world.

[1] Eph. 1, 2.

[2] Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Redemptor Hominis*, 10.

[3] Cfr. *Eph.* 4, 24.

[4] *Hebr.* 13, 8.

[5] *Ps.* 23, 3.

[6] Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Allocutio ad Episcopos Hiberniae*, die 30 sept. 1979.

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