



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS OF JAPAN
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Tuesday, 20 May 1980

Dear Brothers in our Lord Jesus Christ,

Your presence here today near the tomb of the Apostle Peter evokes many thoughts in our hearts.

1. This is a *special moment of ecclesial unity*, as we celebrate our oneness in Jesus Christ and in his Church. You come as pastors of the Church in Japan, bringing with you the hopes and joys, the challenges and problems of your Catholic people. At the same time this a moment when the Church in Rome respectfully greets in your persons the entire Japanese people, of whom you are illustrious and noble sons.

All of you remember with what faithful attention, with what great love Paul VI welcomed Japanese visitors and pilgrims during all the years of his pontificate. Individuals and groups, Christians and non-Christians, religious leaders and representatives of various walks of life came to see him week after week, month after month. For all of them he had a gesture of cordial greeting or a word of esteem and friendship. I too have had the honour of receiving many visits from your fellow-countrymen, and I wish to attest publicly how much their presence is appreciated at the Vatican.

2. This *ad limina* visit, venerable Brothers, is also a *celebration of faith*: the faith of the whole Church in Japan - the faith of which you, in union with the Successor of Peter, are guardians and authentic teachers.

On my part today I wish to render homage to this faith, which through missionary effort was implanted by God as his gift in the hearts of the faithful. This gift of faith was generously accepted and genuinely lived. It became the object of the witnessing of Paul Miki and his martyr

companions, who went to their death proclaiming the names of Jesus and Mary, and who by their martyrdom confirmed the faith as an everlasting heritage in Japan. By the grace of God and the help of his Blessed Mother, this Catholic faith was, moreover, preserved throughout generations by the Japanese laity who maintained by the instinct of faith their unbreakable attachment to the See of Peter.

And today this faith is still expressed in action, nurtured by prayer and offered freely to all who may wish to embrace the Gospel. Through their faith, manifested by fraternal love and by the consistency of their lives, the Christian people of Japan are called give witness to Jesus Christ in their families, in their neighbourhoods, and in all the milieux in which they live; they are called to communicate Jesus Christ to anyone who may wish to know him or embrace his message of salvation and life.

3. *Our own Episcopal ministry of faith:* a ministry that presupposes faith and is at the service of faith - a faith to be lived and communicated. Everything we do is aimed at proclaiming the mystery of faith, and helping our people to live deeply their vocation of faith.

4. Precisely by reason of the central dimension of faith *we see the great value that prayer has in the Church:* faith is kept alive and is fortified by prayer. By prayer, hearts are opened to the promptings of the Holy Spirit and to the message and action of Christ's Church. Hence, we know that fidelity to prayer is an essential element of the Church's life.

In this regard Japan has been blessed with contemplative vocations, with religious who carry on Christ's loving praise of his Father. And in this contemplative aspect of the Church's life in Japan is there not an excellent element of dialogue with your non-Christian brethren, who in their own ancient traditions have given a place of prominence to contemplation? Is not the desire to be united with God in purity of heart one of those elements in which the teaching of our Saviour Jesus Christ is so naturally inculturated into the lives of so many of your people?

5. It is a great credit to Japan how *generations of Christians, steeped in their own culture, have been able to contribute by their activities to the uplifting of society.* The relatively small Christian community in your land has served well in the fields of social assistance, science and education.

Through schools and universities the Christian message has come into contact with the venerable traditions of your people. Zealous Christians who have realized the need to bring the Gospel values into their native culture have begun by giving the upright witness of their own lives. In the midst of their community, when Christians show their capacity for understanding and acceptance, when they share the life and destiny of their brothers and sisters and show solidarity with all the is good and noble, and at the same time give expression to their faith in higher values and to their hope in a life yet to be unfolded in God - then they are fulfilling a task of initial evangelisation with regard to culture, a task consistent with their vocation and the obligations that flow therefrom^[1].

What a lofty role it is for the Bishops of the Church to sustain all the members of the community in their common efforts on behalf of the Gospel, encouraging them to be able to explain the hope that is theirs^[2]. In God's providence the primary witness of life must be coupled with an explicit proclamation of the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the Kingdom and the mystery of Christ^[3]. The encounter between the Gospel and culture can take place only on the condition that the Church faithfully proclaims and lives the Gospel. Here too the Bishops are called to exercise a special responsibility.

6. On this occasion, dear Brothers in Christ, it is my hope *to encourage you to stand fast in your ministry of faith*. The universal Church has been deeply enriched by the contribution of the Church in Japan. The *pusillus grex* has been a credit to the grace of Christ the Saviour, and it continues to give praise to his Father. The future is in the hands of Jesus. It is he, Jesus, who is the Lord of history; it is he who definitively decides the destiny of his Church in each generation. In the preparation of the Easter candle on Holy Saturday we proclaim: "All time belongs to him and all ages; to him be glory and power through every age". Our response to the will of the Lord Jesus for his Church is one of absolute trust coupled with diligent labour, knowing that he will ask us for an accounting.

7. Our ministry of faith has its origin in Jesus Christ and leads to him and through him to the Father. Despite all obstacles and difficulties *we must constantly call our people to the holiness of life that is found in Christ alone: Tu solus sanctus*. In a particular way the Christian family of Japan should be the object of our pastoral care. In this "domestic Church" the catechesis of children must be effectively begun, and the evangelisation of society must take place at its root.

The great love of God for his people and Christ's faithful covenant with his Church must be evident in the family as a community of love and life. I exhort you, Brethren, to make every effort to create in families those healthy conditions of Christian living that favour vocations to the priesthood and religious life. Keep constantly before the young the full challenge of Christ's love and truth, including his invitation to take up the cross and follow him.

[1] Cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 21.

[2] Cf. *1 Pt* 3:15.

[3] Cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 22.

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