



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS OF THE REGIONAL CONFERENCE
OF CHINA IN TAIWAN**

Tuesday, 28 February 1984

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,

It is a real joy to welcome you today, and, through you, to be able to send my affectionate greeting to your collaborators in the apostolate, to the religious families working among you, to the faithful entrusted to your pastoral care and to all your fellow-countrymen.

Our meeting today is not a mere passing event: you are always present in the heart and prayer of the Pope, just as you remain united to him, as I know, through that spiritual solidarity which makes communion with the Successor of Peter a criterion of belonging to the Catholic Church, and which continues the tradition of the "very ancient practice by which bishops appointed the world over were linked with one another and with the Bishop of Rome by the bonds of unity, charity and peace" (*Lumen Gentium*, 22).

Here in the Vatican, during this Holy Year of the Redemption, you have come to draw fresh strength at the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul, in the very city where they sealed their witness by martyrdom, in order to proclaim to a world hostile to them their faith in Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of man.

1. Your coming forms part of the conclusion of the celebrations held in Taiwan last year to commemorate the fourth centenary of the arrival in China of Father Matteo Ricci, while you are making preparations for the 125th anniversary of the evangelization of Taiwan. An occasion for recalling and for repeating to all the Church that living one's faith always presupposes an uprooting, a disregard for one's own interests, and personal witness. You and your faithful people know this well, for you have had to face many trials in order to preserve intact that treasure which

is your faith in Jesus Christ, "the same yesterday and today and for ever" (*Hebr 13, 8*).

This faith you have not wished to keep to yourselves, for in itself, as you were taught by those valorous missionaries who came to you, it is made to be communicated and shared. In this regard I wish to express to you my satisfaction at the way in which you have succeeded in orienting these celebrations: not a nostalgic turning back to the past, but a commitment, a determination to proclaim, in an ever more consistent manner, Christ and his Church to the Chinese people of today.

2. For you are Chinese and proud of it. You belong to a great people, representing a quarter of humanity. A people great not only by its number but above all by reasons of its culture and its values. An industrious people too, whose influence upon the peace and well-being of humanity today and tomorrow cannot be ignored.

The Church has something to share with this people concerning God and man. She wishes to offer to this people the proclamation of the truth which she received from the Apostles: ". . . there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all" (*1 Tim 2, 4-5*).

In a Pastoral Letter for the year 1981, you yourselves wrote: "Far-sighted missionaries . . . considered the proclamation of the Gospel to the Chinese people as their most cherished goal. They came to China . . . for the purpose of proclaiming their Christian faith. We, present-day Chinese, must in turn ask ourselves what we have done with regard to proclaiming the Gospel to our own people and what we can do in this present moment of history. We must try to study carefully what are the main obstacles to our proclamation in the China of today. We must also study in what effective way we can bring the Gospel to our own people" (*Conferentiae Episcopalis Sinensis, Litterae Pastorales IV expleto saeculo a petita terra Sinensium a Matthaeo Ricci, S.I., die 3 dec. 1981*).

3. Yes, dear Brothers, as you have clearly understood, the truth of Christ that you have to proclaim reaches people as they are, situated in time and space. As beloved sons of the Chinese nation, you are entrusted with the task of translating the message of faith into terms that can be understood by your compatriots near or far.

For the Church this problem is not a new one. Ever since her origins, she has had to know how to match her faith and the formulation of it with the surrounding culture. And in doing so she has respected it, drawing from it all its best elements. The missionaries whose apostolic labors in your midst you are celebrating did precisely this. They assimilated your treasures and gave you their own, so that there should be known and loved the one treasure that can be possessed here below: Christ Jesus.

Today the torch has passed into your hands. You have to be present at the heart of that collection of values that make up the culture of a people, the values in which a people recognizes itself, over and above the vicissitudes and momentary separations of history. And the Church - as I had the occasion to say at the time of the closing of the International Congress dedicated to Matteo Ricci in 1982 - "sensitive to the spiritual gifts of every people, cannot fail to regard the Chinese people - the most numerous on earth - as a great unified reality, a crucible of lofty traditions and vital ferments, and therefore, at the same time, as a great and promising hope" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II, *Allocutio ad eos qui conventui in aedibus Pontificiae Universitatis Gregorianaee habito interfuere: quarto expleto saeculo a petita terra Sinensium a Matthaeo Ricci, S.I., 7, die 25 oct. 1982: Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II, VI/3 [1982] 927s.*).

4. The Church living in Taiwan is more especially open to this reality. She does not live turned in upon herself, regretting the past or filled with fear. She prays, she sanctifies herself and works "that the word of the Lord may speed on and triumph" (2 *Thess* 3, 1). Since the long past epoch of the Tang Dynasty (between 617 and 917) which is habitually taken as the time when the evangelization of the Chinese mainland began, right up till 1984, the word of Christ, his message and his Church have lost nothing of their creative power, their light and their newness, for Jesus Christ is with us "to the close of the age" (*Matth* 28, 20) and his reconciling word has taken the form of a cross that links the most widely differing people. We always have to learn their language, their ways of speaking and their habits, in order to tell them about the plan of a God the Father about whom Jesus, by his sacrifice, told us and showed us his love.

It is to you Catholics of Taiwan and the *diaspora* that is entrusted this wonderful task of being a bridge-Church for your mainland compatriots. There other Christian brothers and sisters take up the relay, for the moment hidden like seed in the earth. But all these efforts, all these sacrifices cannot remain without fruit: a day will come when Jesus can be proclaimed, passed on and celebrated in a more visible way through the culture, expectations and aspirations of the whole Chinese nation whom the Church deeply respects and loves.

5. Dear Brothers, I wish to encourage you, and likewise your faithful people, to persevere, to pray and to suffer in order to be ever more open to God's plan, which in spite of everything unfolds through the history of each people: "Do not be afraid . . . the Holy Spirit will come upon you . . . For with God nothing will be impossible" (*Luc* 1, 30-38), as the Angel said to Mary.

As he thinks of you, the Pope wishes to say to you, with all the Church which does not forget you and which knows of your vicissitudes, what the Apostle Paul wrote to the Christians of Colossae: "We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love which you have for all the saints" (*Col* 1, 3-4).

May our zeal to reach man, every man and the whole of man, also help us discover the victorious

love of Christ in the very contradictions of history, a history in which God moves forward through what we are tempted to consider, humanly speaking, as obstacles or impossibilities.

"Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all you who wait for the Lord!" (*Ps* 31, 25). With your eyes gazing into the future, comforted by the witness of those who have gone before you and sustained by the prayer of the whole Church, let the light of the Gospel shine through the devotion and holiness of your communities.

It is also a pleasure for me to greet this morning the members of the Chinese community living in Rome, who have wished to accompany their Bishops for this significant visit. I encourage you all to commit yourselves ever more fully to the Lord Jesus. By the uprightness of your daily lives, may you be witnesses to the Gospel before the world.

With my heart full of affection and prayer I impart to all of you my Apostolic Blessing.

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