



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF POPE JOHN PAUL II  
TO THE BISHOPS OF BANGLADESH  
ON THEIR «AD LIMINA APOSTOLORUM» VISIT**

*Castel Gandolfo  
Tuesday, 3 September 1985*

*My Brothers in the Episcopate,*

1. I am very pleased to greet you on the occasion of your pilgrimage to Rome, as you visit the tombs of Saints Peter and Paul and express your communion with the Successor of the Head of the Apostles.

Our meeting today has deep ecclesial significance. It manifests the richness of diversity within the unity of Christ's Church. It also offers us the opportunity to renew our commitment to each other as brothers in the Episcopate: you, by your very presence here today in Rome; and I, by sharing with each of you my concern for your local Churches and by expressing to you my fraternal support and love as the one to whom has been entrusted the care of all the Churches.

With Saint Paul we can say: *Great is the mystery of the Church* (Cfr. *Eph. 5, 32*). It is a mystery that is one complex reality which comes together from a human and a divine element (Cfr. *Lumen Gentium*, 8). Christ established and ever sustains the community of faith, hope and charity, which is the Church, and through her he communicates truth and grace to all humanity. The pastoral care of this one Church was entrusted to Peter and the other Apostles, who likewise were commissioned to extend it and govern it.

This charge has been transmitted to us, their successors. However unworthy we may be for this sacred office, *we are called nevertheless to serve God's people by offering to them what we ourselves have received, namely, Christ and him crucified and risen from the dead*. The treasure we bear, though carried in vessels of clay, has immense value. We present it to others as Christ's

own treasure, the Good News of salvation proclaimed by Jesus our Saviour. The words of the Apostle to the Gentiles ring in our ears: "It was God who gave us the courage to proclaim the Good News to you in the face of: great opposition. . . . (It) was God who decided that we were fit to be entrusted with the Good News, and when we are speaking, we are not trying to please men but God, who can read our inmost thoughts" (1 Thess. 2, 2. 4). We must see every service we give to the Church from this perspective.

2. The *Church in Bangladesh* is indeed the *pusillus grex*, the little flock which Christ the Good Shepherd looks upon with special love and care. The seed of God's word was sown in your land centuries ago, as witnessed by the presence of the so-called "Dacca Christians". This seed sprouted and matured; it has taken root and flourished in the hearts of Christian believers, impelling them to nurture their faith and then to share it with others.

This outward thrust, the dynamism of Christian revelation, can never be thwarted, since it is the word of God himself which we speak of - the word of him who created and who rules heaven and earth and everything contained within them, and whose all-provident plan for us and for the world we are striving continually to understand.

3. In order to carry out more effectively the Lord's command to preach the Gospel within the context of your own cultural and national setting, you, as Bishops, are called to be ever mindful of an important task which is yours by virtue of your office, namely to serve as "the visible *source and foundation of unity*" (*Lumen Gentium*, 23) in your local Churches. You must call your people to ever greater unity in Christ, while you serve as the focus and the fulcrum of unity for them. This task has many dimensions which should be examined and explored.

The *unity of faith* in the one Lord in the foundation of all ecclesial life. Drawing your people together to be nourished by God's word must be central to your ministry. This *unity must extend to the discipline* of the Church too. This requirement has many dimensions which form an integral part of the call to unity which Christ desires for his Church. Identifying and meeting the special needs of your local circumstances must always be accompanied by respect for the bonds of unity that the Catholic Church shares on all levels; it must, in effect, lead towards greater unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Cfr. *Eph.* 4, 3). All the baptised need to be made aware of their responsibility for seeking personal holiness and for working for the good of the whole Church, as well as for bearing witness before the world.

Christian believers divided among themselves are an occasion of scandal, a real obstacle to the spread of the Gospel. As the movement towards solidarity among peoples is increasing more and more, every believer should be the leaven of concord, unity and peace in the world. Unity of faith and discipline should likewise find ample expression in concerted service of others, especially those most in need of compassion and concern. Such *united action in works of charity* has long been a *hallmark of the Church in your country*. The many educational and charitable institutions

sponsored by the Catholic Church are a source of great edification to all, Christians and non-Christians alike. These accomplishments deserve special recognition and I express my appreciation for all that has been done in this regard. The *Christian presence* should always clearly reflect its ultimate purpose, which is, to *proclaim Christ to others*, whether it be through teaching, caring for the sick, feeding the starving, clothing the naked, sheltering the homeless, or assisting those suffering persecution for the sake of righteousness. When fraternal love is sincere and shown by deeds, there can be no doubt that God's "love is perfected in us" (1 Jo. 4, 12).

4. The union of the Church in Bangladesh with the Church universal continues to be manifested in many ways. I am grateful for the initiatives undertaken this year through your celebration of *International Youth Year*. Your communion with the Church in Rome in marking this occasion illustrates your sensitivity to the importance of giving *young people a prominent place in your pastoral activities*. Encouraging them to deepen their commitment to today's Church so that they can make a contribution to the Church of tomorrow is a marvellous priority for your time and efforts. I encourage you to be generous and zealous in this area, particularly in urging young men and women to live their faith to the full as dedicated lay persons, and in challenging them to accept the Master's special call to the priesthood and religious life.

5. The *common bond* which you share as Bishops, representatives of Christ in your local Churches, is not a static link but one that needs to be strengthened constantly. This strengthening is brought about, in the first place, by ever greater collegial unity *with the Bishop of Rome*, head of the Episcopal College, but it also requires a strengthening of the *collegial spirit among yourselves* as a group of Pastors belonging to one *Episcopal Conference*. Collegial action should never of course prejudice your role as pastors and teachers in the respective local Churches entrusted to your care. Yet the *impact* of the Church upon your country, especially *in the area of evangelization*, will be immensely increased *by your united action* as Bishops of God's people, members of a new nation which has a rich cultural heritage and which is a meeting-place for many religious traditions. Forging new bonds of ecclesial communion within that environment should help to make the voice of Christ and his message of salvation heard ever more clearly in Bangladesh.

6. In recent years the Church has become more and more aware of the need for *dialogue* as a principle of action both inside and outside herself. As a result, she has examined with greater care her relation *with non-Christian religions*. This dialogue has special relevance for the Church in Bangladesh. Greater knowledge of Islam has led Christians to grow in their appreciation of it. The spiritual ties between Muslims and Christians, especially in their common belief in God who is one, merciful and almighty, and who has revealed himself to man, are a sound foundation for fostering mutual understanding and for joint efforts aimed at preserving and promoting peace, freedom, social justice and moral values. The witness of Christians to authentic evangelical living should be borne above all in this sphere, so that the light of Christ may shine forth and give "light to all in the house" (*Matth. 5, 15*).

Meeting the demands of preaching the Gospel in these circumstances requires, on the part of the minister, patience, courage and steadfast perseverance. Yet he must make his own Saint Paul's conviction: "If I preach the gospel, that is no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. *Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!*" (1 Cor. 9, 16).

7. Christ carried out the work of redemption in poverty and obscurity and the Church accomplishes her mission by following the path traced out for her by her Divine Founder. She must encompass with her love all those who are afflicted. This too has particular significance for the *Church in Bangladesh, which bears so clearly the marks of the poor and suffering Christ*. The conditions in which so many people of your country are living impel me to make an appeal for the compassion and help of all people of good will who can see on the faces of the multitudes of suffering men, women and children the image and likeness of the Son of Man.

In the name of these "least of the brethren" I wish to express deep *gratitude to the many priests, religious and laity* of Bangladesh who are spending themselves so selflessly on their behalf. These dedicated individuals, who include the many generous missionaries as well as the local clergy, religious and lay apostles, are *in the forefront of evangelization* and serve as beacons of hope for all to see.

8. Our participation, my Brothers, in the saving mission of Christ compels us to strive for ever greater unity in him. May the Holy Spirit be with you all, he who was sent on the day of Pentecost to sanctify the Church and unify her in communion and in the works of ministry (Cfr. *Lumen Gentium*, 4). May this same Holy Spirit strengthen you and sustain you in your labours on behalf of the Gospel and may he bestow abundant blessings upon those who collaborate with you in this sacred charge - the priests, the men and women religious, the lay catechists and all who witness to Christ by their lives of charity and generosity.

Through the intercession of Mary, the Mother of God and the Mother of the Church, I pray to Christ her Son and our Lord for you and for all the beloved people of Bangladesh. With my special Apostolic Blessing.

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