



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II TO THE BISHOPS OF KOREA

ON THEIR AD LIMINA VISIT Tuesday, 16 October 1990 Your Eminence,

Dear Brother Bishops, 1. Your presence here as the *Pastors of the Church in Korea* on your *ad Limina* visit is a cause of great satisfaction and comfort for me to whom has been entrusted a special "solicitude for all the Churches" (2 Cor. 11, 28). It is almost exactly a year since I visited Seoul for the Forty-fourth International Eucharistic Congress, a time of joyful communion in faith and ecclesial unity for the Church in Korea, indeed for the whole "communion of saints" which has its deepest source in Christ and its fullest sacramental expression in the Eucharist: "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body" (1 Cor. 10, 17). I cannot forget the faith and devotion of your people, and I am happy to learn that the Eucharistic Congress has borne abundant fruits of Christian life and holiness among the faithful. Your *ad Limina* visit is an expression and celebration of the *special* bond of communion that binds us together in the College of Bishops, as successors of the Apostles. It is my ardent hope that by revisiting the tombs of the Holy Martyrs Peter and Paul, and going back as it were to the origins of our apostolic faith, you may be filled with renewed vigor in serving the particular Churches which Divine Providence has entrusted to your care. From the time the faith first entered Korea— in such an extraordinary and evangelical way— down to the present situation of intense vitality within the ecclesial community, the provident love of God has been guiding the Church's steps in your land. *The great signs of holiness and martyrdom* are there for all to see, to admire and to imitate. In the lives of the Korean Martyrs you are witnesses to the fruitfulness of trials undergone for Christ's sake and, in particular, of religious persecution. With humble and joyful hearts may you always praise God for the outpouring of grace that you daily experience through your ministry. 2. The statistics which you provided in preparing this *ad Limina* visit speak loudly of the growth and vitality of the Catholic community in your country. In the five years that have elapsed since your last visit the numbers of priests, of men and women religious, of seminarians and catechists have all increased notably. It is particularly encouraging that your four major seminaries are full and that others may soon be opened. And still, this significant growth cannot keep pace with the increase of the Catholic population. In Saint Paul's terms, you are a healthy, fruitful new branch on the tree that is the Church (Cfr. Rom. 11, 17). What Saint Paul writes to the Romans should find an echo in the hearts of your faithful: "remember it is not you that support the root, but the root that supports you... you stand fast only through faith. So do not become proud, but stand in awe" (*Ibid.* 11, 18. 20). May you always be builders of Christ's peace among yourselves, in the Church and in the world. 3. I have an especially vivid recollection of my visit to the Parish of Nonhyondong where many priests gathered for Eucharistic Adoration and where we meditated together on the *need for the prayer of adoration and for the pastoral charity* that flows from the Eucharist, the center and root of all priestly life (Cfr. *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 14). The theme of the priesthood is before our eyes in these days of the Synod of Bishops dedicated to questions of priestly formation. The manner in which the one priesthood of Jesus Christ is lived and exercised by the priests of Korea is among the questions

confronting your ministry as Bishops, and in this area also I wish to encourage you to be wise stewards of God's grace. Every vocation to the priesthood or to the consecrated life is a sublime gift of God, both to the individual concerned and to the Church, particular and universal. It is a grace which must be prayed for, fostered and whole-heartedly supported by the entire ecclesial community. The community's task is to make it possible for those called to respond to this grace with a free and generous offering of themselves to Christ and to the Church. In the case of the priesthood, it is also for the Bishop personally to exercise an authoritative role in judging the call received and the degree of preparation and commitment gained on the way to Ordination. I ask you take my prayerful encouragement to the beloved priests and seminarians of Korea. I renew the wish I expressed at Nonhyondong that they be close to the members of the flock, sharing their joys and sorrows, readily available to all, in a simple lifestyle stemming from true poverty of spirit (Cfr. Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Homilia in loco v.d. "Nonhyondong Parish"*, 3, die 7 oct. 1989: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, XII, 2 [1989] 785 s). To be worthy and effective ministers of the Gospel, Bishops and priests must have an attitude of willing *detachment from self and from the world*. The priest's calling implies a likeness to Christ not only through imitating the Lord's example but, even more so, it implies a call, through the Sacrament of Orders, to become one with Christ in his "emptying of self, taking the form of a servant... humbling himself and becoming obedient unto death" (Cfr. *Phil.* 2, 6-8). The ministry of the word, of sacrament and of pastoral charity cannot be separated from this interior *kenosis* which must always be a mark of the Christian life in union with Christ. The thirst for advancement in the spiritual life and for greater love and solidarity in human affairs, so felt by your people, can only be satisfied if sacred ministers are truly men of God, fervent in prayer and deeply moved by zeal for the Father's house (Cfr. *Jo.* 2, 17).⁴ It is in fact the whole Christian community which is called to exemplify the selfgiving offering of Christ to the Father. The Final Statement of the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences held in Bandung last July speaks of the Church's mission in Asia in terms of service: *service of the Lord and of needy humanity*. This too is the path of the Church in Korea, which is faced with the task of reaching out more and more to the less fortunate members of society, in particular to workers and the poor. This outreach, in turn, greatly depends on how you pursue the difficult and delicate question of fostering a deep, penetrating but always respectful meeting between the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ and the traditional ethos of a people formed in other religious and cultural molds. The Church in Korea, like the Church throughout Asia, "was not sent to observe but to serve—to serve the Asian peoples in their quest for God and for a better human life; to serve... under the leading of the Spirit of Christ and in the manner of Christ himself who did not come to be served but to serve and to lay down his life as a ransom for all (Cfr. *Marc.* 10, 45)— and to discern, in dialogue with Asian peoples and Asian realities, what deeds the Lord wills to be done so that all humankind may be gathered together in harmony as his family" (*Final Statement of the Fifth Plenary Assembly of FABC*, 6. 3). All of this demands that the Church in Korea be animated by a *truly missionary spirit* and express "*an authentic discipleship*", holding "the contemplative dimension, renunciation, detachment, humility, simplicity and silence in the highest regard" (Cfr. *ibid.* 9. 1 et 9. 2). I emphasize these aspects because you yourselves are fully aware of the force of attraction which a more worldly way of life can exercise over the ministers and servants of the Gospel when their "mission" is not clearly rooted in the "consecration" which stands at its foundation.⁵ The theme of unity in its many dimensions is one with which you are familiar. During my visit to Seoul last year I noted that the "Korean nation is symbolic of a world divided and not yet able to become one in peace and justice" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Homilia Seuli occasione oblata Stationis Orbis*, 4, die 8 oct. 1989: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, XII, 2 [1989] 800). For forty years the life of your people has been profoundly affected by a tragic division which has split families and been the cause of many tensions in society. At present, you anxiously await a sign that global political changes and Korean initiatives themselves might lead in the direction of hoped-for reunification based on authentic justice, freedom and respect for inalienable human rights. *As Bishops you follow*

closely these questions insofar as social, political and cultural realities are connected with important humanitarian, moral and religious concerns. It is your task to help the Catholic faithful to approach these questions with a conscience that is well formed in the ethical demands of the Gospel and the social teaching of the Church, in which love and mercy have a preeminent place. You yourselves have noted your great need to provide a continuing formation of the laity in the truths of the faith and in the application of the Church's moral teaching to the realities of life in a changing and increasingly complex society. In the task of applying the truths and values of the Gospel to temporal realities, *the laity are the ones who have a specific call and competence*, as is recognized in the teaching of the Council and in the law of the Church (Cfr. *Lumen Gentium*, 31; *Codex Iuris Canonici*, *can. 255*). The family, civil society, the development of culture, the world of economics and political engagement: these constitute the specific field of endeavour for Catholic lay men and women deeply imbued with the Gospel values of love, justice, freedom, truth and peace. The secular field is the natural and ordinary environment for their activity and technical expertise, and it is therefore the place where they ought to bear Christian witness and further the Church's mission.⁶ Speaking of the relationship between the Church and society, the Pastoral Constitution "*Gaudium et Spes*" offers a general synthesis of various roles in the life of the Church. "It is to the laity... that secular duties and activity properly belong. ... It is their task to cultivate a properly informed conscience and to impress the divine law on the affairs of the earthly city. For guidance and spiritual strength let them turn to the clergy; but let them realize that their pastors will not always be so expert as to have a ready answer to every problem... This is not the role of the clergy: it is rather up to laymen to shoulder their responsibilities under the guidance of Christian wisdom and with eager attention to the teaching authority of the Church" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 43). It is important for the ecclesial community to have a clear awareness of the distinction of roles. Priests and religious do not lose their rights as members of the civic community or their duty to work for the common good. But being endowed with a specific calling to ministry or religious consecration, they assume other duties which imply restrictions on engagement in purely temporal affairs or partisan politics. This does not mean that the pastors of the Church cannot denounce injustices where they exist or advocate more humane and ethical laws and policies. But their contribution to the progress of society lies more in forming consciences and motivating the laity in the pursuit of more just structures of socio-economic, political and cultural life. Thus society will be transformed "from within", as a consequence of the validity and effectiveness of *an immanent Christian presence*. Christ's image of the "leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened" (*Matth.* 13, 33), is always relevant to the Church's presence in society.⁷ Dear Brother Bishops, these are some of the thoughts which your visit inspires. They are spoken with love and understanding. Their purpose is to enable me in some way to share with you in the joys and sorrows of your ministry. We are united in the conviction that the Lord, in his love, is calling the Church in Korea to meet *the challenges of this hour* by bearing credible witness to the values of the Kingdom of God *through Christlike deeds*. Be assured of my constant prayer for the Church in Korea, that all her members will respond courageously and generously to the hour of grace you are experiencing. Take my encouragement and best wishes to the priests and religious, to the seminarians and catechists, to the catechumens and all who seek the truth of Christ, to the families and parish communities. "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen" (*1 Cor.* 16, 23-24). © Copyright 1990 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana