



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II TO THE BISHOP OF MACAO

To the Venerable Brother

Domingos Lam Ka Tseung

Bishop of Macao After almost 424 years from the day on which my predecessor Gregory XIII erected the diocese of Macao, the diocesan community entrusted to the care of Your Excellency prepares itself to live an important event in its plurisecular history, when on December 20 next the Territory will return under Chinese sovereignty. Created to provide for the pastoral needs which were emerging with the spread of Christianity in the Asian Far East, the diocese of Macao included at the beginning all of China, with other bordering territories and adjacent islands. Its history was thus intertwined with the history of the evangelisation of the whole surrounding geographical area, in particular with that of China, a country of ancient philosophical-religious traditions. The function of gateway of the Church towards China, assigned by Divine Providence to the diocese of Macao and fulfilled during four centuries with alternating vicissitudes, will assume new forms now that the diocesan community will be part of the Church in China by full right: in particular, it must strengthen its missionary vocation in the midst of the Chinese world, so as to become a point of reference and of spiritual support also for the numerous brothers and sisters in the faith who live dispersed in the vast reaches of China. The historic-cultural tradition of that particular Church is rich in significant values. Macao was not only the gateway of evangelisation for the Chinese continent, but also an advance post of Christian culture and a meeting point with the cultures of the Far East. In that city, in fact, with the creation of the prestigious "Colégio Universitário de S. Paulo", there was established the first University of Studies in the Far East, already in 1594, that is, just 39 years from the moment when the Portuguese navigators had disembarked for the first time in Macao. Thus, alongside the elementary instruction, which had been immediately organised by the Church, there was launched also that of the higher level. Apart from the field of culture, the presence of the Catholics was notable in social work, as is shown, among others, by the "Santa Casa da Misericórdia", which was established in 1569 and has played a great part in the human history of the local population. At this important moment, when the Territory returns to be an integral part of China, the Church that is in Macao, rich in tradition and dignity, is called to continue its commitment to spiritual, cultural and social service. At the vigil of the new century, and in the context of the Holy Year, now imminent, may it know how to give impetus to its evangelic commitment, renewing with generosity and with audacity the methods and the forms both of the religious witness and of the valuable service which it provides in the educational, scholastic and assistential sectors. May it be a prophetic Church which announces to man, seduced by avidity for material goods and disorientated in his aims, the high and inspiring reason of the moral life, the dignity and the freedom of every human person, the beauty of the Gospel, the joy of following

Christ. May it be a Church faithful to the significance of the name with which the city is adorned: "Macao, City of the Name of God". May it speak without fear to all of the love of God the Father, revealed in Jesus and poured out in the Holy Spirit. May it hold high its tradition, witnessed to by the innumerable and splendid sacred edifices which over the centuries it has dedicated to the Mother of God, to St. Joseph, to St. James, to St. Francis Xavier. May it maintain in full its communion with the Universal Church, and, as in the past, may it always cherish its communion with the Church of all of China, to which it is now bound by a special civil link.

In formulating these wishes, I desire to assure of my prayer, and of that of the whole Church, for the diocesan community of Macao and for the wider Catholic family of all of Mainland China. To you, Venerable Brother, I send my affectionate greeting and my Apostolic Blessing, which I extend to the clergy, to the men and women religious, to the laity and to all persons of good will. *From the Vatican, December 3, 1999, the feast of St. Francis Xavier, Patron of the Missions.* **JOHN PAUL II**