



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II TO THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN CHINA

“And the Word was made flesh”

Dear Brothers and Sisters of the Catholic Church in China,

On the eve of the Great Jubilee, when we will commemorate the two thousandth anniversary of the Birth of Christ, I greet all of you joyfully and with great affection in the love of God the Father and in the communion of the Holy Spirit.

All Catholics of Chinese origin are close to my heart as Pastor of the universal Church, but at this time I urgently wish to address in a special way the Shepherds and faithful of mainland China, who cannot as yet show forth, in a full and visible way, their communion with this Apostolic See.

1. Brothers and sisters of the Church in China, together with the faithful throughout the world who are preparing to celebrate the Great Jubilee and the beginning of a new Millennium, you have responded to the invitation of the Successor of Peter and the Bishop of Rome and you are approaching this event in faith.

The practical suggestions which I made in the Bull of Indiction *Incarnationis Mysterium*, and the provisions for gaining the Jubilee Indulgence laid down in the Decree of the Apostolic Penitentiary, will be for all Catholics the norm and guide for a fruitful celebration of this providential year of grace, not only in Rome and the Holy Land, but throughout the Church.

For very many Catholics around the world it will not be possible to pass through the Holy Door in Rome and to venerate the Tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul. Nevertheless, wherever they live, all are invited to realize that “to pass through that door means to confess that Jesus is Lord; it is to strengthen faith in him in order to live the new life which he has given us. It is a decision which presumes freedom to choose, and also the courage to leave something behind, in the knowledge that what is gained is divine life (cf. *Mt 13:44-46*)” (Bull of Indiction, *Incarnationis Mysterium*, 8).

2. Our hearts turn back to the moment in history when, in “the fullness of time” (*Gal 4:4*), the Son of God was born among us: an event which most of mankind has now accepted as the point of reference for the measurement of time and history.

The birth of Jesus took place in a province of Palestine, an Asian land at the crossroads of the great cultural exchanges of East and West, a point where Asia, Europe and Africa meet.

This birth was, and still is today, a source of joy for all people in “the vast span under heaven”, exactly as the Angel announced to the shepherds at Bethlehem: “I bring you news of a great joy which will come to all the people: for to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord” (*Lk 2:10-11*).

The name given to the newborn child – Jesus, “God gives salvation” – is a synthesis of his mission and a promise for the whole human race: “God desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (*1 Tim 2:4*); “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (*Jn 3:16*).

3. During his lifetime, Jesus began to accomplish what was said of him at his birth: “To the poor he proclaimed the good news of salvation, to prisoners freedom and those in sorrow joy” (*Fourth Eucharistic Prayer*). To carry out God’s merciful and mysterious plan for the salvation of men and women, “he gave himself up to death, but by rising from the dead he destroyed death and restored life” (*ibid*).

Before his Ascension and his return to the Father, he commanded his disciples, and in them the infant Church: “Go therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (*Mt 28:19*).

Obedient to the Lord and under the impulse of the Holy Spirit, the disciples carried out Jesus’ command, bringing the Good News to East and West, North and South.

4. The Jubilee not only recalls Jesus’ entry into history, but also his expanding presence among the peoples of the earth.

As you well know, dear brothers and sisters, in accordance with the mysterious plans of divine Providence the Gospel of salvation soon reached your own country: as early as the fifth and sixth centuries groups of Syrian monks crossed Central Asia and brought the name of Jesus to your forebears. Even today, a famous stele in the capital Chang’an (Xi’an) powerfully evokes that moment in history, from 635 onwards, which saw the official entrance into China of “the Religion of light”.

Some centuries later, that proclamation waned. But the fact that the Gospel of Jesus was

preached to your ancestors at a time when much of Europe and the rest of the world had not yet heard it, should surely fill you with gratitude to God and intense joy.

5. The Gospel message, proclaimed in those distant beginnings, has lost none of its relevance, and it invites and impels you to make it known to those who have not yet received it.

The life of Jesus' disciples, then as now, in China as elsewhere, must be inspired by the "Good News", and the genuine living of the Gospel in your lives will be a shining witness borne to Christ in your surroundings. For this reason all of you, dear brothers and sisters, are called to proclaim the Gospel of salvation to the Chinese people of today with new vigour.

I realize that you feel unequal to such a great and demanding mission, but you know that you can count on the victorious power of Christ (cf. *Jn* 16:33), who promises you his presence and help. Led by your Pastors and in communion with them, you, dear priests, religious men and women, and lay people, will develop updated pastoral plans, placing primary emphasis on all that relates to the proclamation of Jesus and his word of life, and giving special attention to young people.

In this context, the celebration of the Jubilee will be an occasion for remembering the apostolic labours, the sufferings, the tears and the shedding of blood which have been part of the Church's journey among the people of every time. In your midst, too, the blood of your martyrs has become the seed of a multitude of authentic disciples of Jesus. My heart overflows with wonder and gratitude to God for the generous witness given by a host of Bishops, priests, men and women religious, and lay people. And it seems that the time of trial, in some places, has not yet come to an end!

6. In your preparation for the Great Jubilee, remember that in the Biblical tradition this moment always entailed the obligation to forgive one another's debts, to make satisfaction for injustices committed, and to be reconciled with one's neighbour.

You too have heard the proclamation of the "great joy prepared for all peoples": the love and mercy of the Father, the Redemption accomplished in Christ. To the extent that you yourselves are ready to accept this joyful proclamation, you will be able to pass it on, by your lives, to the men and women around you. My ardent desire is that you will respond to the interior promptings of the Holy Spirit by forgiving one another whatever needs to be forgiven, by drawing closer to one another, by accepting one another and by breaking down all barriers in order to overcome every possible cause of division.

Do not forget the words of Jesus at the Last Supper: "By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (*Jn* 13:35).

I rejoiced when I learned that you intend your most precious gift on the occasion of the Great

Jubilee to be unity among yourselves and unity with the Successor of Peter. This intention can only be a fruit of the Spirit who guides the Church along the arduous paths of reconciliation and unity.

7. “One sign of the mercy of God which is especially necessary today is the sign of charity, which opens our eyes to the needs of those who are poor and excluded” (Bull of Indiction *Incarnationis Mysterium*, 12).

The practical commitments that will evidence your striving for spiritual conversion and renewal must include charity towards your brothers and sisters in the traditional form of the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. This concrete solidarity will also be your quiet but effective contribution to the good of your People. Thus you will give eloquent testimony to the name of Christian which you bear with courage and pride: as good Chinese and authentic Christians, you love your country and you love the Church, both local and universal.

8. The Jubilee of the Year 2000 will be a great prayer of praise and thanksgiving above all for the gift of the Incarnation of the Son of God and the Redemption which he has accomplished.

It will be praise and thanksgiving for the gift of the Church, founded by Christ as “a sacrament or sign of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind” (Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, *Lumen Gentium*, 1).

This thanksgiving “will embrace the fruits of holiness which have matured in the life of all those many men and women” — including those from your own People — “who in every generation and every period of history have fully welcomed the gift of Redemption” (*Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 32).

9. United among yourselves in the truth and charity of Christ, in communion with the universal Church and with him who has been called by Jesus to be the Successor of Peter and the pledge of unity, cross the threshold of the new Millennium, confident that the one God and Father of the whole human race will continue to bless your steps and those of all your People. Be a leaven of good for your People, despite your small numbers! Be a sign and a sacrament of the salvation promised by God to all men and women, and invite your neighbours to hear and to believe the good news of the Great Jubilee: “To you is born a Saviour!”

May Mary, Mother of the Redeemer, Help of Christians and Queen of China, protect you and sustain you as you fulfil your vocation and strive, with ever more intent and generous hearts, to put these resolutions into practice.

10. At this point, my vision broadens to embrace, together with you, all the Chinese Catholics living outside of mainland China. To them goes my affectionate greeting along with my sincere

hope that, during the Jubilee Year, they will be reassured “in the knowledge that they bring to the world the true light, Christ the Lord” (Bull of Indiction *Incarnationis Mysterium*, 2). They themselves will be a light and a leaven wherever Providence has placed them, and they will foster union of spirit with all their brothers and sisters of the great Chinese family.

“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.” With these sentiments I send all of you my heartfelt blessing!

From the Vatican, 8 December 1999, Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary.