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**PASTORAL VISIT TO INDIA**

**13-15 SEPTEMBER 2015**

**MEETING WITH THE BISHOPS, PRIESTS,**

 **RELIGIOUS AND LAY-FAITHFUL**

**ARCHDIOCESE OF CALCUTTA**

***Monday, 14 September 2015***

Dear Brother Bishops, Priests, Religious and Lay-faithful,

 It is my great pleasure to be here with you for these couple of days, in your noble country. I recall with fond memories my visit, two years and a half ago, when I came to India as Special Envoy to Vailankanni in Chennai for the celebrations of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the elevation of the Shrine of *Our Lady of Good Health* to the dignity of Minor Basilica, and the Twenty-fifth Anniversary of the establishment of the Conference of the Catholic Bishops of India. After having visited Delhi and Ranchi, your Archbishop together with the Apostolic Nuncio, have unfailingly invited me to visit Calcutta.

This time, visiting the Diocese of Rajshahi in Bangladesh for the Twenty-fifth Anniversary of the creation of the same Diocese, I wanted to also take the opportunity to be with you, here, in Calcutta.

 I come to this Archdiocese as a pilgrim, just three months before the inauguration of the Jubilee Year of Mercy announced by His Holiness Pope Francis, from whom I bring to you his Apostolic Blessing. In India and throughout the world, Calcutta has become synonymous with mercy through the foresight, love, and mercy of Blessed Mother Teresa towards the poor and under-privileged. That is why I come to you as a pilgrim.

 I have now served four years as the Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. During these years I came to know more about the Church in your beloved country and in this particular Region of West Bengal, with its dynamic forces, efforts and difficulties that need to be faced from time to time. Today, I also come to you to share the Gospel with you, which as the source of spiritual joy brings the power of grace for all men and women (cfr. *Evangelii Gaudium* n. 1).

 As Bishops, priests, religious and lay-faithful our witness, to use the words of Pope Benedict XVI, must be “*animated by the fire of the Spirit, so as to inflame the hearts of the faithful who regularly take part in community worship and gather on the Lord’s day to be nourished by his word and by the bread of eternal life.*”[[1]](#footnote-1) We must exercise ourselves spiritually in an active way so as to help other believers, and perhaps even non-believers, to respond to God’s love and call to holiness through the realities of everyday life.

 Unfortunately, among baptized people we come across those “*whose lives do not reflect the demands of Baptism,*”[[2]](#footnote-2) who lack a meaningful relationship to the Church and their life in it; people who no longer experience the consolation of being born in faith and the joy of the Gospel. There are also others, who not only live as if they never received baptism, but think that it is not necessary for their salvation or for a life of grace. The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches: “*The Lord himself affirms that Baptism is necessary for salvation. He also commands his disciples to proclaim the Gospel to all nations and to baptize them. Baptism is necessary for salvation for those to whom the Gospel has been proclaimed and who have had the possibility of asking for this sacrament. The Church does not know of any means other than Baptism that assures entry into eternal beatitude; this is why she takes care not to neglect the mission she has received from the Lord to see that all who can be baptized are “reborn of water and the Spirit.” God has bound salvation to the sacrament of Baptism, but he himself is not bound by his Sacraments*” (CCC n. 1257). Through our Baptism we become: “a new creature,” “members of the Body of Christ,” “living stones,” “a holy priesthood,” to be “built into a spiritual house.”

 Let us not forget that evangelization, our mission by virtue of our Baptism and for those who also received the Holy Orders, is first and foremost about preaching the Gospel to those who do not yet know Jesus Christ as the only Saviour, and to those who have rejected him. Many of them are quietly seeking God, led by a yearning to see his face. All of them have a right to receive the Good News. All Christians have the duty to proclaim the Gospel without excluding anyone. As St. Paul, the Apostle of the Gentiles, said to the people of Corinth: “*Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel*.” (1 Cor. 9,16). We should appear as people who wish to welcome others, who share our true joy, who point to a horizon of beauty and who invite others to a special occasion, where a special table is prepared and all partake of the delicious banquet. The Church grows not by proselytizing, but by its witness and by attraction (cfr. *Evangelii Gaudium* n. 15). Usually, those who do not evangelize might have lost the sense of their faith and Christian identity. That is, they are in a state of spiritual malaise.

 Today missionary activity is the greatest challenge of the Church and our missionary task must always remain at the top of the Diocesan agenda or pastoral plan. We cannot “stay put” or passive in our churches, chapels, and mission stations. I would like to recall what the Holy Father Pope Francis says in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* n. 15, “*we need to move from a pastoral ministry of mere conservation to a decidedly missionary pastoral ministry*.” These are very significant words, which help us reflect.

 Dear brother Bishops, as successors of the Apostles we carry a great responsibility for the life of the Church. We must lead by example and we must take the first step. Remember that the Lord has taken the initiative, he has loved us first (cfr. 1 Jn 4,19), and therefore we must go forward, courageously take the necessary initiatives within the communities we have been entrusted with, reaching out, seeking those who have fallen away and welcoming the poor and the underprivileged.

 Dear Priests, get involved by word and deed in the people’s daily lives: bridge distances in families in difficulty, help those who are going through a separation or those who are in an irregular marriage situation, always defend the human person in connection with migration, refugees, and unemployment. Allow me to once again quote the words of Pope Francis in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* n.24: “*Evangelizers thus take on the “smell of the sheep” and the sheep are willing to hear their voice. An evangelizing community is also supportive, standing by people at every step of the way, no matter how difficult or lengthy this may prove to be. It is familiar with patient expectation and apostolic endurance. Evangelization consists mostly of patience and disregard for constraints of time*.”

 Dear Religious, in the context of the Year of the Consecrated Life I urge you to devote yourselves more to prayer and reflection. Remember that the desire to follow Jesus Christ more closely prompted the emergence of consecrated life in the Church. We thank God that, throughout its history, the Church was enriched with different charisms, as was most certainly the Church in India. These charisms are meant to renew and build up the Church and not to hinder its growth through the formation of cliques, false security, or power games. When a particular charism is directed to the heart of the Gospel, it becomes more ecclesial, authentic and fruitful. In your conscience ask yourselves why you chose and accepted religious life for what it truly is: a gift of love at the service of a missionary Church. Please allow Christ to be at the centre of your spirituality and of all your activities, just like Mother Teresa, who used to see and feel Christ’s face everywhere.

 Dear Lay-faithful, at times we lose our enthusiasm for mission because we do not believe that the Gospel responds to our deepest needs. The Gospel is friendship with Jesus Christ; the Gospel is love of our neighbor. If you manage to convey this basic and fundamental message in your neighbourhood, place of work, and other venues you frequent, it will speak directly to the hearts of people because, in the words of St. John Paul II, “*the missionary is convinced that, through the working of the Spirit, there already exists in individuals and peoples an expectation, even if an unconscious one, of knowing the truth about God, about man, about how we are to be set free from sin and death. The missionary’s enthusiasm in proclaiming Christ comes from the conviction that he is responding to that expectation.*”[[3]](#footnote-3) The true missionary senses Jesus alive with him in the midst of the missionary initiative. Unless we see him present in our commitment and in our activities, our enthusiasm wears out and we are no longer sure of what we are carrying out. Dear brothers and sisters: please remember that those who are not convinced, enthusiastic, certain, and passionate in what they are doing, will become sterile.

 Let us look to our Mother Mary as a model of evangelization. What we see in her, that is, humility and tenderness are not the virtues of the weak but of the strong; virtues of those who do not need to treat others poorly in order to feel good about themselves. Let us ask for the intercession of Mary, the Star of evangelization, that the Church may become a home for the many, excluding no one on the basis of race, colour, ethnicity or caste. May love and communion be at the heart of everything we do in the Church in India! I pray that the Lord inspire all of you to look forward, to listen deeply, and to move together in the spirit of the upcoming Year of Mercy.

On behalf of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, I sincerely thank each and every one of you for your dedication to the various ministries entrusted to you by the Church. I also wish to convey to you the Apostolic Blessing of the Holy Father and to assure you of my prayers, that your missionary initiatives in West Bengal will bear much fruit for the benefit of the Church in India. Thank you.

1. Benedict XVI, [*Homily at Mass for the Conclusion of the Synod of Bishops* (28 October 2012)](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/homilies/2012/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20121028_conclusione-sinodo_en.html): AAS 104 (2102), 890. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Idem.* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. St. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter [*Redemptoris Missio*](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_07121990_redemptoris-missio_en.html)(7 December 1990), 45: AAS 83 (1991), 292. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)