

THE POPE ADDRESSES

THE CHINESE CHURCH



On Feb. 16, 1981, Pope John Paul II set out on a pastoral visit to Asia. On Feb. 18, in the Philippines, the Pope met with a group of Chinese Catholics and used the occasion to address the whole Chinese Catholic Church. The speech was filled with words of good will, encouragement and comfort. Addressing his Chinese brothers and sisters in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, he said: "Travelling so close to the borders of your country, I also wanted to speak to you, for across the distances that separate us we are all united 'in the name of the Lord Jesus' (Col. 3:12). Ever since God's providence in its mysterious ways called me from my native Poland to the See of Peter in Rome, I have ardently desired to express my affection and esteem to all my brothers and sisters of the Church in China, and to praise the Lord for the great things that he has wrought in the hearts of those who profess his name in the cities and villages of your immense land." (Here the Pope points out that, since he himself comes from a socialist country Poland, he understands the situation in such a country.)

The pope mentioned that the purpose of his trip was to honor the Nagasaki Martyrs and through them to honor all the

men and women of Asia who have given their lives for the Gospel. This shows that the Gospel of Christ and His Church are not alien to any country or race of people, but on the contrary, live in the minds and hearts of people of all races and nations.

Continuing, the Pope praised the distinguished culture, renowned history and rich moral values of the Chinese people. He also said that although some people did not understand the Chinese culture as Matteo Ricci did, the difficulties and unpleasant experiences belong to the past. "It is the future that we have to look to." he said.

The Pope also mentioned the four modernizations and said that he believes "that every Catholic within your frontiers willingly contributes to the building up of China, since a genuine and faithful Christian is also a genuine and good citizen." Following this, the Pope explained that a Christian citizen of any country in the world, is loyal to his faith, and at the same time must carry out his duties to his country and race. The Pope said: "A good Chinese Catholic works loyally for the progress of the nation, observes the obligations of filial piety towards parents, family and country." At the same time, the good news is meant for every race of people in the world. "There is therefore no opposition or incompatibility in being at the same time truly Christian and authentically Chinese."

The Pope also pointed out: "The Church has no other aim than to be faithful to the mission entrusted to her by her Divine Founder. She has no political or economic goals; she has no worldly mission. She wants to be, in China as in any other country, the herald of the Kingdom of God. She desires no privileges, but only that all those who follow Christ may be able to express their faith freely and publicly and live according to their consciences." Then he repeated that a Chinese believer can be at one and the same time "a good Christian and an

exemplary citizen".

Lastly, the Pope addressed himself to the Catholics in the Chinese Church who express their faith in different ways: "For many years we have not been able to have contact with each other... But in those long years you have undoubtedly lived through other experiences which are still unknown, and at times you will have wondered in your consciences what was the right thing for you to do. For those who have never had such experiences it is difficult to appreciate fully such situations." In addition, the Pope in a sympathetic and concerned way said: "I, and the universal Church with me, have been with you in thought, in prayer, in genuine brotherly love and in pastoral concern...If you remain united with the Lord in faith and prayer, he will strengthen and guide you."

Afterwards, to those who have heroically witnessed to their faith he said: "I also wish to express my deep admiration of the testimonies of heroic faith that many of you have shown and are still showing today. The whole Church is proud of you and feels strengthened through your witness." Moreover, the Pope said, the ancient Chinese proverb "Between the four seas, all men are brothers" complements the heart and thought of the Christian message, and both have meaning for a world full of injustice and discrimination.