



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE BISHOPS OF THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE OF CROATIA
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Thursday, 6 July 2006

*Your Eminence,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,*

With great joy I cordially welcome you to Peter's house, making my own the words of the Apostle Paul: "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all, making my prayer with joy, thankful for your partnership in the Gospel from the first day until now" (Phil 1: 3-5).

Your commitment to proclaiming the Good News in a spirit of convinced ecclesial communion is also confirmed by your *ad limina* visit, with which you wish to witness to the sincere attachment of the Church in Croatia to the Chair of Peter.

I am grateful to Cardinal Josip Bozanic who, as President of the Croatian Bishops' Conference, has addressed a greeting to me, acting as your spokes-man and of the flock of God entrusted to each one of you.

The brotherly meetings and fruitful conversations of these days, in which you have shared with me the positive results and hopes as well as the difficulties and worries of your Dioceses, have given me an opportunity to be better acquainted with the situation of the Church in your regions.

You are rightly proud of the 14 centuries of Christian heritage and faith of your people, but at the same time you are well aware that dedication to God is not only a fruit of the past but a personal act that engages before God every individual, regardless of the generation to which he belongs.

To enable the souls in your care to acquire a deeper knowledge of Jesus Christ and to encounter him personally, you have prepared numerous pastoral projects that witness to your great

commitment and justify hope and optimism. Particularly important are your initiatives for a sound preparation for the sacraments and an appropriate participation in the liturgy.

I also noted your commitment to religious formation and to the quality of catechesis, both in schools and in parishes.

Furthermore, how can one fail to highlight the care for the traditional devotions and frequent pilgrimages, especially to the Marian shrines?

Then, mention should also be made of the prudent opening to the new incentives of the Spirit, who distributes his own charisms and prepares people to assume responsibility and offices that further the renewal and continuing development of the Church.

I warmly hope that, trusting in the Lord's promise to be present among us always, you will continue to journey on with your peoples on the route of consistent adherence to Christ's Gospel.

Your Country, Croatia, has always lived in the context of European civilization; hence, it justifiably desires to be recognized as a member of the European Union. Its desire is to cooperate, with its entry into this Institution, for the good of all the Continent's inhabitants.

Thus, the Nation will be able to enter into relations with other European peoples, bringing the contribution of its own culture and traditions to the joint search for the full truth about man.

Indeed, it is essential that the building of the common European house always be founded on the truth about man, hence, based on the affirmation of each person's right to life, from conception until natural death; on recognition of the spiritual element of the human being in which his inalienable dignity is rooted; and on respect for the religious choices of each person in which his insuppressible openness to the transcendent is witnessed.

It is even possible to find consensus on these values among people who accept the voice of reason, although they do not belong to the Catholic Church, and who are sensitive to the dictates of natural law.

I know that you are working with your priests and faithful with this in mind.

In encouraging you to persevere, I assure you of the backing of the Holy See, which has always viewed Croatia with appreciation and affection. The ties between the Apostolic See and your Nation, already strong in the past, have continued to grow stronger, as the recent approvals of bilateral Accords testify.

In the future too, the Holy See will stand beside you and follow with concern and support the

efforts of your people on the path of authentic progress.

It is necessary, nevertheless, to realize that the routes to good and desirable goals are not exempt from the threats of contemporary cultural currents such as secularization and relativism.

Consequently, if the faithful are to avoid these dangers, an unwearied proclamation of Gospel values is essential. Following the example and teachings of the great figures of your particular Churches - I am thinking in particular of Bl. Alojzije Stepinac, Bishop and Martyr -, do not be afraid to point out to them what the Gospel teaches, putting them on guard against all that is in opposition to it so that your communities may be a stimulus for the whole society in the commitment to the common good and attention to the neediest.

My thoughts go at this time to the numerous families, to those who live in a precarious situation despite their hard work, to the unemployed, the elderly and the sick.

Your Country, unfortunately, is still suffering the consequences of the recent conflict whose negative effects are not only felt in the economy, but also in the hearts of the inhabitants who sometimes feel burdened by this legacy.

Always be proclaimers of reconciliation and peacemakers among the citizens of your Homeland, encouraging them on the path of Christian reconciliation: forgiveness first sets free the person who had the courage to grant it.

Venerable Brothers, the pastoral challenges are numerous and the time we are living in is not free of problems. However, we are certain of help from on High.

It is here that the Bishop's service appears even more important. If he is to give a credible witness to all, he must think of nothing but serving Christ.

Be generous, therefore, in serving the Church and your people, persevering in prayer and full of zeal in preaching.

Follow with special care the formation of the priests, your collaborators, encourage priestly vocations and watch attentively over your seminarians.

I urge you to guide in love and in a spirit of reciprocal collaboration the religious communities and movements, both those of consecrated life and the secular ones.

Continue to encourage in families faithful love, harmony and daily prayer, encouraging them to generous openness to life.

Moreover, how can we fail to see the importance of the presence of Catholics in public life as well as in the media? It also depends on them to ensure that a voice of truth on the current problems may always be heard.

I pray that each one will be able to work for the glory of God and for men and women, so that thanksgiving to the Giver of every good may ring out everywhere, in accordance with the Apostle's words: "Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, to him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever" (Eph 3: 20-21).

Venerable Brothers, you may be certain of my support and prayer for the work that God has entrusted to you on behalf of your communities. Your *ad limina* visit has shown that you are of "one heart and one mind" with your faithful and that you foster a profound sense of communion with the Successor of Peter, and therefore with the universal Church.

As I invoke upon you and upon your ministry the intercession of Mary, Our Lady of the Great Croatian Baptismal Vow, I cordially impart my Blessing to you, to your priests, to the consecrated men and women as well as to the entire Croatian People.

May Jesus and Mary be praised!

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