



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE BISHOPS FROM THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Thursday, 5 July 2007

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

At this collective meeting during your visit *ad limina Apostolorum*, I rejoice to share the same faith in Jesus Christ which accompanies our journey and is alive and present in the communities entrusted to your pastoral care. I address my affectionate greeting to you as well as to the diocesan Churches over which you preside with such great dedication and generosity.

I am grateful to Archbishop Ramón Benito de la Rosa y Carpio of Santiago de los Caballeros, President of the Dominican Bishops' Conference, for his kind words on behalf of all. At the same time, I feel I closely share in your anxieties and aspirations. I ask God to grant that this visit to Rome may be a source of blessings for all the priests, religious communities and pastoral workers who collaborate with you amid the beloved Dominican People, aware of the challenges of the globalized world which are to be reckoned with today.

In your quinquennial reports, I noted that your Church is a community that is alive, dynamic, participatory and missionary; it feels challenged by Jesus' mandate to proclaim the Gospel to the whole creation (cf. Mk 16: 15) and strives to ensure that this proclamation reaches everyone. To achieve this goal, the message must be clear and precise so that the words of life proclaimed may be converted into personal attachment to Jesus, our Saviour.

Thus, "it is urgent to rediscover and to set forth once more the authentic reality of the Christian faith, which is not simply a set of propositions to be accepted with an intellectual assent. Rather, faith is a lived knowledge of Christ, a living remembrance of his commandments and a truth to be lived out" (*Veritatis Splendor*, n. 88).

The priority of your pastoral ministry must be to ensure that the truth about Christ and the truth about man penetrate more deeply the different strata of Dominican society, since "[t]here is no true evangelization if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, are not proclaimed" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n. 22).

This work, which is not exempt from difficulties, develops among a people whose spirit is open and sensitive to the Good News.

There is no doubt that the symptoms of a process of secularization are also making themselves felt in your Country in which for many people God does not represent the origin and destination of life nor its ultimate meaning. Yet, basically, as you well know, this people has a profoundly Christian soul, demonstrated by the lively and active Ecclesial Communities in which so many people, families and groups are doing their best to live and witness to their faith.

The family is also a priority objective of the new evangelization. It is the true "domestic Church", especially when it is the fruit of lively Christian communities which produce young people who have a true vocation to the Sacrament of Marriage.

Families are not alone in having to face great challenges; the Ecclesial Community supports them, enlivens their faith and ensures their perseverance in a Christian project of life that is all too often subject to so many ups and downs and dangers.

The Church desires that the family truly be the place where the person is born, matures and is educated for life, and where parents, by loving their children tenderly, prepare them for healthy interpersonal relationships which embody moral and human values in the midst of a society so heavily marked by hedonism and religious indifference.

At the same time, in collaboration with the public institutions, Ecclesial Communities will be on the alert to safeguard the stability of families and to encourage their spiritual and material progress. This will lead to an improvement in the upbringing of children.

For this reason, it is to be hoped that the Authorities of your beloved Country collaborate increasingly in this indispensable task of working for families.

In this regard, my Predecessor stressed in his *Message for the World Day of Peace* in 1994: "The family has a right to the full support of the State in order to carry out fully its particular mission" (n. 5).

I am not unaware of the problems which the family institution encounters in your Nation, especially with the drama of divorce and the pressures to legalize abortion, in addition to the spread of unions that do not comply with the Creator's plan for marriage.

I know that you take special care of priestly vocations in order to meet all the needs of your Dioceses. Indeed, the promotion of priestly and religious vocations must be a priority for the Bishops and a commitment of all the faithful.

I therefore fervently implore the Lord of the harvest that he will continue to give to your seminaries - which must be seen as the very heart of the Diocese (cf. *Optatam Totius*, n. 5) - numerous candidates to the priesthood who will one day serve their brethren as "servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God" (I Cor 4: 1).

In addition to an integral formation, a profound discernment is necessary on the human and Christian suitability of seminarians in order to ensure as well as possible that their future ministry will be exercised with dignity.

Taking into account that "the presbyterate thus appears as a true family" (*Pastores Dabo Vobis*, n. 74), it is desirable that the bonds of charity between the Bishop and his priests be very strong and cordial. If young men see that priests live a true spirituality of communion around their Bishop, witnessing to union and charity among themselves, to Gospel charity and missionary availability, they themselves will feel more attracted to the priestly vocation.

It is of paramount importance that Bishops pay special attention to their principal collaborators, the priests (cf. *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, n. 8), that they be impartial in their dealings with them, closely acquainted with their personal and pastoral needs, fatherly to them in their difficulties and that they give constant encouragement to their priests' work and endeavours and, in the context of the new evangelization, that they reach out to those who have distanced themselves.

The theme this year of the Third Pastoral Plan: "Disciple of the Lord, welcome those who are close and seek out those who are distant", has a vast application in the complex context of migration which involves so many families.

Devote much effort to reach groups of your compatriots who are abroad, but I also warmly ask you to accompany with great love the Haitian immigrants who have left their Country in search of better living conditions for themselves and their families, as you are already doing.

I am pleased to observe that you have already been in contact with your brother Bishops of Haiti in the endeavour to alleviate the situation of poverty and wretchedness which is an offence to the dignity of so many people in this Sister Nation.

In your episcopal ministry many pastoral challenges are closely related to the evangelization of culture which must promote human and evangelical values in their full integrity.

The field of culture is one of "the modern equivalents of the Areopagus", in which the Gospel must

be made present with its full impact (cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, n. 37). It is impossible to do this task without the social communications media: radio, television broadcasts, videos and computer networks can be most useful for spreading the Gospel far and wide.

This task particularly involves lay people, since it is part of their distinctive task to "take on themselves this renewal of the temporal order. Guided by the light of the Gospel and the mind of the Church, prompted by Christian love, they should act in this domain in a direct way and in their own specific manner" (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, n. 7).

It is therefore necessary to give them an appropriate religious formation which makes them capable of facing the numerous challenges of contemporary society. It is up to them to promote the human and Christian values which illumine the political, economic and cultural reality of the Country, in order to establish a fair and more equitable social order in accordance with the Church's social doctrine.

At the same time, consistent with ethical and moral norms, they must set an example of honesty and transparency in the management of public activities, in the face of the sly and widespread blight of corruption which at times also creeps into the areas of political and economic power, as well as into other public and social milieus.

Lay people must be the leaven in society, acting in public life to illumine with Gospel values the various areas in which a people's identity is forged. With their daily activities, they must "testify how the Christian faith constitutes the only fully valid response... to the problems and hopes that life poses to every person and society" (*Christifideles Laici*, n. 34).

Their condition as citizens and followers of Christ must not induce them to lead "two parallel lives in their existence: on the one hand, the so-called 'spiritual' life with its values and demands; and on the other, the so-called 'secular' life, that is, life in a family, at work, in social relationships, in the responsibilities of public life and in culture" (*ibid.*, n. 59).

On the contrary, there must be an effort to make consistency in life and in faith an eloquent testimony of the truth of the Christian message.

Together with you, I would like to entrust all these suggestions and desires to the Virgin of Altagracia, the title with which you honour your Mother and Patroness of the Nation, so that she will continue to accompany your pastoral work.

I entrust you to her with full hope as I impart to you my Apostolic Blessing, which I cordially extend to your particular Churches, your priests, religious communities and consecrated persons as well as to the Catholic faithful of the Dominican Republic.

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