



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI TO THE BISHOPS OF HAITI ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT

Thursday, 13 March 2008

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

I warmly welcome you at the time when you are making your visit *ad limina Apostolorum*, an occasion to strengthen your communion with the Successor of Peter and with one another and to share with the Roman Curia the causes of joy and hope as well as of concern experienced by the People of God entrusted to your pastoral care. I would first like to thank Archbishop Louis Kébreau, newly appointed Archbishop of Cap-Haïtien and President of the Bishops' Conference, for his words addressed to me on your behalf recalling the situation of the Country and the Church's activity. I greet in particular the Bishops who have recently resigned from their pastoral office and those who have received a new one. My thoughts also go to your faithful as well as to all the beloved People of Haiti.

I would like to recall the Visit to Haiti made by my Predecessor, Pope John Paul II, 25 years ago for the close of the National Eucharistic Congress, by evoking the central theme of this gathering: "Something must change here" (Homily, 9 March 1983, Port-au-Prince, n. 4; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 19 April, p. 7). Have things changed? Your Country has been through times of suffering that the Church has followed attentively: division, injustice, poverty, unemployment, elements that are a source of profound anxiety for the people. I ask the Lord to instil in the hearts of all Haitians, especially those with social responsibility, the courage to promote change and reconciliation, so that all the Country's inhabitants may have worthy living conditions and benefit from the goods of the earth in ever greater solidarity. I cannot forget those who are forced to go to the neighbouring country to meet their needs. I hope that the International Community will pursue and intensify its support for the Haitian People in order to enable them to increasingly take in hand their future and their development.

One of the concerns presented in your quinquennial reports is the situation of the family structure,

rendered unstable by the crisis that has spread across the Country and also by the evolution of customs and the progressive loss of the meaning of marriage and the family by putting it on the same level as other forms of union. It is largely from the family that society and the Church develop.

Your attention to this aspect of pastoral life is therefore fundamental, for it is a question of the first place for the education of youth. "The Christian family springs from marriage, which is an image and a sharing in the partnership of love between Christ and the Church; it will show forth to all men Christ's living presence in the world and the authentic nature of the Church: by the love and generous fruitfulness of the spouses, by their unity and fidelity, and by the loving way in which all members of the family cooperate with each other" (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 48). I therefore encourage you to support married couples and young families by giving them increasingly appropriate support and formation and thereby also teaching them respect for life.

In your episcopal ministry, priests occupy a privileged place: they are your first collaborators. By paying attention to their continuing formation and establishing fraternal and trusting relationships, you will help them to exercise a fruitful ministry, asking them to abstain from political involvement. It is important that meetings with priests be regularly organized so that they may have a tangible experience of the presbyterate and support one another by prayer. Convey my affectionate greetings to all your priests; I know of the faithfulness and courage they require in order to live in situations that are often difficult. May they build their apostolate on their relationship with Christ, on the Eucharistic mystery which reminds us that the Lord gave himself unreservedly for the world's salvation, on the sacrament of pardon, on their love for the Church, bearing an eloquent witness to their priestly commitment through an upright, humble and poor life.

You are attentive to the pastoral care of vocations and the formation of young men who present themselves and for whom it is necessary to exercise a profound discernment. For this reason, you seek teams of formation teachers for your seminaries. I ask you to consider with the episcopates of other countries being open to formation experts whose priestly lives are exemplary, in order to accompany the future priests your dioceses need through the different stages of their human, moral, spiritual and pastoral formation. The future of the Church in Haiti depends on this. May the local Churches hear this appeal and accept the task to give the gift of priests in order to help you in the formation of seminarians, in accordance with the Encyclical *Fidei Donum*; this will also be for the Church in Haiti an opening, a treasure and a source of numerous graces.

Despite the lack of means, Catholic schools play an important role in Haiti. They are appreciated by the Authorities and by the populace. I give thanks for the people committed to the beautiful mission of educating youth. Take them my warm greetings. It is through teaching that the formation and maturation of personalities is obtained by recognition of the essential values and the practice of the virtues; it is also a conception of man and of society that is passed on. Catholic schools are important places for evangelization by the witness of life given by the educators, by

the discovery of the Gospel message or by the celebrations lived in the heart of the educational community. Tell the young Haitians that the Pope has confidence in them, that he knows their generosity and their desire to succeed in their lives, that Christ calls them to an ever more beautiful existence and to remember that he alone brings the true message of happiness and gives life its full meaning. Yes, your young people are a cause of joy and hope to me. A country that wants to develop, a Church which desires to be more dynamic, must first focus their efforts on young people. It is therefore your task to encourage the formation of lay adults, so that they may ever more effectively carry out their Christian mission in the world and in the Church.

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate, at the end of this meeting, I wish to express once again my spiritual closeness to the Church in Haiti, as I pray to the Lord to give her strength for her mission. May I also acknowledge the work of the men and women religious and volunteers, often involved with the poorest and most deprived members of society, showing that by fighting poverty one is also fighting the numerous social problems that stem from it. May they be supported by everyone in this task. I warmly impart an affectionate Apostolic Blessing to each one of you and to the priests, consecrated persons and all the lay faithful of your dioceses.