



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE ORDINARIES OF CENTRAL ASIA
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Thursday, 2 October 2008

Venerable Brothers,

I am particularly glad to meet you at the end of your visit *ad limina Apostolorum*. I welcome your greeting, expressed by Archbishop Tomash Peta. I greet each one of you, the Bishops and the Delegate for Greek-Catholic faithful in Kazakhstan, the Apostolic Administrator in Kyrgyzstan, the Apostolic Administrator in Uzbekistan, the Superior of the *Missio sui iuris* in Tajikistan and the Superior of the *Missio sui iuris* in Turkmenistan. I am also grateful to you for bringing me the greeting of the faithful entrusted to your pastoral care in the Region of Central Asia. I assure you that the Successor of Peter follows your ministry with constant prayer and brotherly affection. This house, the house of the Bishop of Rome, is also yours.

I listened to each one of you with great interest and attention, hearing about your communities' achievements, commitments, projects and aspirations, and, of course, also the problems and difficulties that you confront in your pastoral action. Let us thank the Lord that the flame of the faith is still burning in believers' hearts despite the harsh pressure in the years of the atheist and Communist regime. This is thanks to the self-denial of zealous priests, religious and lay people. Communities can be reduced to a "little flock". You must not be discouraged, dear Brothers! Look at the first communities of the Lord's disciples. Although they were small they did not withdraw into themselves but, impelled by Christ's love, did not hesitate to shoulder the burdens of the poor and to meet the needs of the sick, joyfully proclaiming and witnessing to the Gospel to all. Today too, as then, it is the Holy Spirit who leads the Church onwards. Therefore, let yourselves be guided by him and keep alive in the Christian people the flame of faith; preserve and make the most of the worthwhile pastoral and apostolic experiences of the past; continue to teach everyone to listen to the Word of God, inculcate - especially in young people - love for the Eucharist and Marian devotion and spread the practice of the Rosary among families. Furthermore, seek with patience

and courage new forms and methods for the apostolate, concerned to put them into practice in accordance with today's needs, bearing in mind the language and culture of the faithful entrusted to your care. This will demand ever stronger unity among you as Pastors and among the clergy.

Your commitment to achieving this will certainly be more effective and efficient if you do not act alone but seek to increasingly involve the priests, your first collaborators, men and women religious, as well as the lay people dedicated to the various pastoral projects. Then remember that it is first and foremost these cooperators of yours, labourers, like you, in the Lord's vineyard, to whom you must listen and pay attention. Be available, therefore, and willing to meet their expectations, support them in difficult moments and invite them to place ever greater trust in Providence who never abandons us, especially in times of trial; be beside them when they traverse situations of human and spiritual loneliness. May all things be founded on constant recourse to God in prayer and a constant effort for unity among yourselves, as well as in each one of your respective and different communities.

All these things appear even more necessary in order to face the challenges to the proclamation of the Good News and consistent practice of Christian life posed by today's globalized society in your regions too. Here I would like to recall that in addition to the difficulties I mentioned earlier, almost everywhere in the world disturbing phenomena are seriously threatening security and peace. I am referring in particular to the scourges of violence and terrorism, to the spread of extremism and fundamentalism. Of course, it is necessary to combat these scourges with legislation. Yet the force of the law can never be transformed into injustice, nor can the free practice of religions be limited, because professing one's own faith freely is one of the fundamental and universally recognized human rights.

Then I feel it is helpful to reaffirm that the Church does not impose but rather freely proposes the Catholic faith, well aware that conversion is the mysterious fruit of the Holy Spirit's action. Faith is a gift and the work of God. For this very reason every type of proselytism that forces, induces or entices someone to embrace the faith by unworthy devices is strictly forbidden (cf. *Ad Gentes*, n. 13). A person can open himself to the faith after mature and responsible reflection and must be able to achieve this intimate inspiration freely. This is not only for the individual's benefit but indeed for that of the whole of society, for the faithful observance of the divine precepts is helpful in building a more just and supportive coexistence.

Dear Brothers, I encourage you to persevere in the work you have undertaken, wisely making the most of the contributions of all. I take this opportunity to thank the priests and religious who work in the various ecclesiastical circumscriptions, and in particular: the Franciscans in the Diocese of the Most Blessed Trinity in Almaty, the Jesuits in Kyrgyzstan, the Conventual Franciscans in Uzbekistan, the religious of the Institute of the Incarnate Word in the *Missio sui iuris* in Tadjikistan, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate in the *Missio sui iuris* in Turkmenistan. I also ask other religious families to make a generous contribution by sending personnel and means to bring to completion

the apostolic work in the vast regions of Central Asia. I repeat to each one of you that the Pope is with you and supports you in your ministry. May Mary, Queen of Apostles, always watch over you and over your communities. May you always be accompanied by my prayers as I warmly bless you all.

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