



The Holy See

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

Consistory Hall

Thursday, 16 October 2008

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

I receive you with great joy on your *ad limina* visit which I have looked forward to with such pleasure, and which gives me the opportunity to put into practice the mandate that the Lord entrusted to the Apostle Peter to strengthen his brethren in the faith (cf. Lk 22: 32). May I first of all express to you my deep sorrow at the death of Cardinal Antonio José González Zumárraga, Archbishop emeritus of Quito, who served the Church to the end of his days with such great self-denial and fidelity. I ask the Lord to grant him eternal repose and to increase the fruitful work carried out by this most exemplary Pastor.

I am grateful for the kind words of Archbishop Antonio Arregui Yarza of Guayaquil, President of the Bishops' Conference, expressing your sentiments of affection and communion as well as the principal desires that inspire your mission as successors of the Apostles. Motivated by concern as Pastor of the universal Church, I feel very close to you in your anxieties and encourage you to persevere with hope in your generous work at the service of the diocesan communities entrusted to our care.

I note with pleasure that one of the pastoral initiatives that you consider most urgently necessary for the Church in Ecuador is the realization of the "great mission", convoked by the Latin American Episcopate in Aparecida (cf. *Final Document*, n. 362), which was confirmed at the Third American Missionary Congress, celebrated in Quito last August. The call that the Lord Jesus addressed to his disciples, sending them out to preach his message of salvation and to make disciples of all the peoples (cf. Mt 28: 16-20) must be a constant cause of meditation and the *raison d'être* of all pastoral action for the entire ecclesial community. Today too, as in all times and places, men and

women need a personal encounter with Christ, in which they can experience the beauty of his life and the truth of his message.

To face the numerous challenges of your mission amid a cultural and social environment that seems to forget the deepest spiritual roots of its identity, I ask you to open yourselves with docility to the action of the Holy Spirit so that under the impetus of his divine power the missionary zeal of the first Gospel preaching, as well as of the first proclamation of the Gospel in your regions, may be renewed. This requires that you make a generous effort to spread the Word of God in such a way that no one is left without this indispensable spiritual food, the source of life and light. The reading of and meditation on Sacred Scripture, in private or in the community, will lead to the intensification of Christian life, as well as to a renewed apostolic impulse in all the faithful.

On the other hand, be fully aware that this missionary effort is based in a special way on priests. Full of love and gratitude for your priests, you must accompany them as fathers and brothers with prayer, affection and closeness, assuring them in addition a satisfactory continuing formation that helps them keep their priestly life vibrant. Continue likewise to encourage religious in their witness of consecrated life, which has brought so many fruits of holiness and evangelization to those lands, and encourage them so that faithful to their charism and in full communion with the Pastors they may continue in their self-sacrificing service to the Church.

At the same time, as you face the scarcity of clergy in many parts of your country, you are firmly committed to involving all the groups, movements and people in your dioceses in a broad and generous vocations ministry, sowing in young people a passion for the figure of Jesus and the great ideals of the Gospel. This effort must be accompanied by the greatest possible care in the selection and intellectual, human and spiritual training of seminarians. In this way, faithful to the teachings of the Magisterium and with the clear awareness that they are ministers of Christ the Good Shepherd, they will be able to assume the requirements of their future ministry with joy and responsibility.

At this important stage in her history, the Church in Ecuador needs mature and committed lay people who, with a solid doctrinal formation and a deep inner life, live out their specific vocation to illumine with the light of Christ all the human, social, cultural and political reality (cf. *Lumen gentium*, n. 31).

In this regard, I would like to thank you for the effort you are making, not without great sacrifices, to attract the attention of society to those values that make human life more just and supportive. Although the Church's activity cannot be confused with political action (cf. *Deus caritas est*, n. 28), she must nevertheless make her contribution to the human community overall through reflection and moral judgments on those political issues that especially affect the dignity of the person (cf. *Gaudium et spes*, n. 76). Among these should be pointed out, partly because of its importance for the future of your People, the promotion and stability of the family, founded on the bond of love

between a man and a woman, the defence of human life from the moment of its conception to its natural end, and also the responsibility of parents for the moral education of their children, in which the important human and Christian values that forged the identity of your peoples are transmitted.

I also urge you to pay special attention to the charitable action of your Churches in which the merciful love of Christ is made present, especially to people in need, the elderly, children and emigrants, as well as women who have been abandoned or abused.

Dear Brothers, the recent canonization of St Narcisa de Jesus Martillo Morán expresses the spiritual fruitfulness of our communities. May the example and intercession of this young Ecuadorian Saint obtain fresh vitality and great apostolic zeal for all your particular Churches, so that, full of faith and hope, they may throw themselves into the exciting task of sowing the Gospel in the hearts of all the men and women of this blessed land!

At the end of our brotherly meeting, I reaffirm my encouragement to you in your pastoral tasks and ask you to convey the Pope's greeting and closeness to your priests, deacons and seminarians, to the missionaries, to the men and women religious, and to all the lay faithful. Together with these fervent good wishes and invoking the protection of the Virgin Mary, I impart the Apostolic Blessing to you all with affection.

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