



The Holy See

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

Consistory Hall, Papal Summer Residence, Castel Gandolfo
Thursday, 11 September 2008

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

I receive you with great affection and joy at this meeting which brings your *ad limina* visit to a close. It has given you the opportunity to make your bonds of communion with the Successor of Peter even closer and to renew, at the tombs of the Apostles, your faith in the Risen Jesus Christ, the true hope of all humankind.

I would like to express my warm gratitude to Bishop Ignacio Gogorza Izaguirre of Encarnación, President of your Bishops' Conference, for his kind words on behalf of all. I too, prompted by anxiety for all the Churches (cf. 2 Cor 11: 28), share in your worries and in your desires as Pastors of Christ, and I ask the Lord to support all your priests, religious, seminarians and lay faithful who are dedicated with true love to the Gospel cause.

The pastoral challenges you must face are truly immense and complex. In confronting a cultural context that is seeking to distance God from individuals and from society or that views him as an obstacle to personal happiness, a vast-scale missionary effort is urgently needed which, by placing Jesus Christ at the centre of all pastoral action, will succeed in introducing the beauty and truth of his life and message of salvation to everyone. People are in need of this personal encounter with the Lord who opens to them the door to a life illuminated by God's grace and love. In this sense, the presence of true witnesses of authentic Christian life, together with the holiness of pastors, is a requirement that is ever timely, both in the Church and in the world. For this reason, dear Brothers, aware that one of the most precious gifts you can offer your communities is your own pastoral ministry, I encourage you, by means of a holy life woven of love for God, of ecclesial fidelity and of generous self-giving to the Gospel, to become true examples to your flock

(cf. 1 Pt 5: 3).

Bishops, together with the Pope and under his authority, are sent to perpetuate the work of Christ (cf. *Christus Dominus*, n. 2). In addition to being the visible principle and foundation of unity in his own particular Church, the Bishop himself is also the bond of ecclesial communion and the point of convergence between his particular Church and the universal Church (cf. *Pastores Gregis*, n. 55). As Successor of the Apostle Peter, I encourage you to continue to work sparing no effort to increase unity in your diocesan communities and also with this Apostolic See. The unity for which the Lord Jesus prayed, especially at the Last Supper (cf. Jn 17: 20-21), is a source of authentic pastoral and spiritual fruitfulness.

Priests rightly occupy a very important place in your hearts. With the imposition of hands they were configured more closely to the Good Shepherd and share in his priesthood as true administrators of the divine mysteries (cf. 1 Cor 4: 1) for the good of the brethren. I encourage you to offer them, together with your nearness and esteem for their work, a satisfactory continuing formation that will help them to revitalize their spiritual life (cf. 1 Tm 4: 14-16). Thus motivated by a profound feeling of love and obedience to the Church, they may work tirelessly, offering to all the only food that can appease the human thirst for fulfilment: Jesus Christ Our Saviour. At the same time, the joy, conviction and fidelity with which priests live their vocation every day will inspire in many young people the desire to follow Christ in the priesthood, responding generously to his call. I am glad to note that one of your priorities is indeed the pastoral care of youth and vocations. To this end, it is necessary to provide seminarians with the human and material means they need to help them acquire a sound inner life and an adequate intellectual and doctrinal training, especially with regard to the nature and identity of the priestly ministry.

My recognition and gratitude also extend to the religious for the zeal and love with which they have proclaimed the Christian faith from the beginning of the evangelization of your regions. I ask them to continue to be witnesses of an authentically evangelical life with their vows of chastity, poverty and obedience.

For the Christian message to reach the furthest corners of the earth, the indispensable collaboration of the lay faithful is essential. Their specific vocation consists in imbuing the temporal order with the Christian spirit and transforming it in accordance with the divine plan (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 31). Pastors in turn are duty-bound to offer them all the spiritual and formative means they need (cf. *ibid.*, n 37) so that by living their own Christian faith consistently they may truly be the light of the world and the salt of the earth (cf. Mt 5: 13).

A significant aspect of the mission proper to lay people is their service to society through the exercise of politics. According to the Church's doctrinal ministry, "The direct duty to work for a just ordering of society, on the other hand, is proper to the lay faithful" (*Deus Caritas Est*, n. 29). Lay people must therefore be encouraged to live this important dimension of social charity with

responsibility and dedication, so that the human community to which they belong with every right may progress in justice, rectitude and in the defence of true and authentic values - such as the protection of human life, marriage and the family - thereby contributing to the true human and spiritual good of all society.

I know how many efforts you are making to alleviate the needs of your people that sadden your hearts as Pastors. Taking into account that the charitable activity of the Church is "a way of making present here and now the love which man always needs" (*ibid.*, n. 31), I ask you, in your ministry, to be a living image of Christ's love within reach for all your brethren, especially those who suffer the most, the marginalized, the elderly, the sick and prisoners.

Before concluding, I would like to reaffirm, dear Brothers, my gratitude and my affection for your daily efforts at the service of the Church. I pray the Lord that this meeting may reinforce your reciprocal communion and strengthen you in faith, hope and charity. I would also like to entrust to you the task of bringing back to your priests, religious, seminarians and all your diocesan faithful, the greeting, closeness and prayers of the Pope.

As I entrust you yourselves, your intentions and your pastoral projects to the Virgin Mary of Caacupé, I impart with my affection a special Apostolic Blessing to you all.

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