



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO BISHOPS OF THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE OF BRAZIL
(WEST 1 AND WEST 2 REGIONS)
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

*Papal Summer Residence, Castel Gandolfo
Monday, 7 September 2009*

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

With deep joy and friendship I greet and welcome each and every one of you, beloved Pastors of the West I and West II Regions of the National Bishops' Conference of Brazil. With your group, the long pilgrimage of the members of this Bishops' Conference on their visits *ad limina Apostolorum* begins and it will give me the opportunity to become better acquainted with the reality of your respective diocesan communities. They will be days of fraternal sharing, to reflect together on the matters that worry you. It is an event longed for since those unforgettable days in May 2007, when during my visit to your country I was able to experience the deep affection of the Brazilian people for the Successor of Peter and, in particular, when I had the opportunity to embrace with my gaze the entire episcopate of this great nation at the meeting in the Cathedral of Sé in São Paulo.

In fact, only God's great heart can know, safeguard and guide the multitude of sons and daughters that he himself has begotten in the great vastness of Brazil. During our conversations in these days several problems and challenges have emerged that you are facing, as the Archbishop of Campo Grande mentioned at the beginning of our meeting. The distances that you yourselves, together with your priests and the other missionary workers, must cover for the service and pastoral animation of your respective faithful are impressive. Many of them live with problems that stem from a relatively recent urbanization in which the State does not always succeed in being an instrument for the promotion of justice and the common good. Do not lose heart! Remember that the proclamation of the Gospel and adherence to the Christian values, as I said recently in my Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, "is not merely useful but essential for building a good society and for

true integral human development" (n. 4). I thank you, Bishop Vítorio Pavanello, for the cordial words and devout sentiments you have addressed to me on behalf of all. I am pleased to reciprocate with my good wishes for the peace and prosperity of the Brazilian people on their important National Feast Day.

As Successor of Peter and Universal Pastor, I can assure you that every day I feel your anxieties and apostolic efforts in my heart and never cease to remember to God the challenges you face in the development of your diocesan communities. In these days, and in Brazil, the labourers in the Lord's harvest continue to be few for a harvest that is abundant (cf. Mt 9: 36-37). In spite of this shortage, the satisfactory formation of those who are called to serve the People of God remains truly essential. For this reason, in the context of the Year for Priests that we are celebrating, may I be permitted to pause today to reflect with you, beloved Bishops of the Western Brazil, on the concern that marks your episcopal ministry which is to generate new pastors.

Although God is the only one who can plant the call to the pastoral service of his people in the human heart, all the members of the Church should question themselves on the deep urgency and real commitment with which they feel and live this cause. One day, Jesus answered several disciples who were stalling, saying that there were "yet four months" to go before the harvest, with the words: "I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see how the fields are already white for harvest" (Jn 4: 35). God does not see as human beings see!

The urgent need of the good Lord is dictated by his wish that "all men... be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tm 2: 4). There are many who seem to want to spend their whole life in an instant and others who wander in tedium and inertia or who abandon themselves to every sort of violence. Basically, these are nothing other than desperate lives in search of hope, as a widespread if sometimes confused thirst for spirituality shows, a renewed quest for landmarks in order to continue on the journey through life.

Beloved Brothers, in the decades that followed the [Second Vatican Council](#), some have interpreted openness to the world not as a requirement of the missionary zeal of the Heart of Christ, but rather as a passage to secularization, seeing in it several values of great Christian depth, such as equality, freedom and solidarity, and showing that they were ready to make concessions and to discover areas of cooperation. So it was that certain leading clerics took part in ethical debates in response to the expectations of public opinion, but people stopped speaking of certain fundamental truths of faith, such as sin, grace, theological life and the last things. They were unconsciously caught up in the self-secularization of many ecclesial communities; these, hoping to please those who did not come, saw the members they already had leave, deprived and disappointed. When they meet us, our contemporaries want to see what they see nowhere else, that is, the joy and hope that come from being with the Risen Lord.

Today there is a new generation born into this secularized ecclesial context. Instead of showing

openness and consensus, it sees the abyss of differences and opposition to the Magisterium of the Church growing ever wider, especially in the field of ethics. In this desert without God, the new generation feels a deep thirst for transcendence.

It is the youth of this generation who knock at the doors of the seminary and need formation teachers who are real men of God, priests totally dedicated to formation, who witness to the gift of themselves to the Church through celibacy and an austere life, in accordance with the model of Christ the Good Shepherd. Thus, these young men will learn to be sensitive to the encounter with the Lord in daily participation in the Eucharist, in loving silence and prayer and in seeking, in the first place, the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

Beloved Brothers, as you know it is the Bishop's task to establish the fundamental criteria for the formation of seminarians and priests in fidelity to the universal norms of the Church: it is in this spirit that the reflections on the theme must be developed, the object of the Plenary Assembly of your Episcopal Conference that took place last April.

With the certainty that I can count on your zeal in all that concerns formation to the priesthood, I ask all Bishops, their priests and the seminarians, to reflect in their own lives the love of Christ the Priest and Good Shepherd, as did the Holy Curé d'Ars. And, like him, may they take as their model and the protector of their vocation the Virgin Mother who answered uniquely to God's call, conceiving in her heart and in her flesh the Word made man, to give him to humanity. Please take back to your dioceses, together with a cordial greeting and the assurance of my prayers, a fatherly Apostolic Blessing.

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