



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE BISHOPS OF THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE OF BRAZIL (SOUTH II REGION) ON
THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Friday, 5 November 2010

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,

“May the God of hope fill you with joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope” (Rom 15:13) so that you may guide your people to the fullness of salvation in Christ.

I warmly greet each and every one of you, beloved Pastors of the South ii Region on your visit *ad limina Apostolorum*, and I thank your President, Bishop Moacyr, for his words to me expressing the sense of communion which unites you with the Successor of Peter. For all this I am grateful to you. This house is also yours: you are welcome! Within it you can experience the universality of the Church of Christ which extends to the furthest boundaries of the earth.

In their turn, each of your particular Churches, dear Bishops, is the generous point of arrival of a universal mission, the blossoming “here and now” of the universal Church. In this case, the right relationship between the “universal” and the “particular” can be seen not when the universal recedes in the face of the particular, but when the particular opens up to the universal and allows itself to be attracted and appreciated by it. In the divine plan, the Church is one: the Body of Christ, the Bride of the Lamb, the Heavenly Jerusalem, the definitive Church that would be the most profound aim of creation, willed as a place where God’s will is done and earth becomes Heaven. I remind you of these principles, not because you do not know them but because they help us to give consecrated people their right place in the Church. Indeed, within her, not only do unity and plurality not oppose each other but they also mutually enrich each other, insofar as they seek to build up the one Body of Christ, the Church, through the love “which binds everything in perfect harmony” (Col 3:14).

The chosen portion of the People of God, consecrated men and women, remind us today of “a plant with many branches which sinks its roots into the Gospel and brings forth abundant fruit in every season of the Church's life” (Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, n. 5). Since love is the first fruit of the Spirit (*cf.* Gal 5:22) and the greatest of all charisms (*cf.* 1 Cor 13:31), the religious community enriches the Church, of which it is a living part, first of all with its love: it loves its particular Church, enriches her with its charisms and opens her to a more universal dimension. The delicate relations between the pastoral requirements of the particular Church and the charismatic specificity of the religious community were addressed by the Document *Mutuae Relationes*, to which are foreign both the idea of isolation and the independence of the religious community in relation to the particular Church, as well as the idea of its practical absorption into the context of the particular Church. “Just as a religious community cannot act independently of the particular Church, or as an alternative to it, or much less against the directives and pastoral programme of the particular Church, so the particular Church cannot dispose, according to her own pleasure and according to her needs, of a religious community or of any of its members” (*Fraternal Life in Community*, n. 60).

Before the dwindling of members in many institutes and their aging, evident in certain parts of the world, many are asking if the consecrated life is still an option capable of attracting young men and women. We know well, dear Bishops, that the various religious families — from monastic life to the religious congregations and societies of apostolic life, from secular institutes to the new forms of consecration — have had their origin precisely in history, but consecrated life as such originated with the Lord himself who chose this form of virginal, poor and obedient life for himself. For this reason consecrated life can never be absent or die out in the Church: it was desired by Jesus himself as an irremovable part of his Church. Hence the appeal to general commitment to the pastoral care of vocations: if consecrated life is a good for the whole Church, something that interests everyone, pastoral care that aims to promote vocations to the consecrated life must also be a commitment felt by all: Bishops, priests, the consecrated and lay people.

Therefore, as the conciliar Decree *Perfectae Caritatis* affirms, “the up-to-date renewal of institutes depends very much on the training of the members” (n. 18). It is a fundamental affirmation for every form of consecrated life. An institute's ability to form members, both in the initial phase and in the successive phases, is at the heart of the whole process of renewal. “If in fact, consecrated life is in itself ‘a progressive taking on of the attitude of Christ’, it seems evident such a path must endure for a lifetime and involve the whole person... reshaping the person in the likeness of the Son who gives himself to the Father for the good of humanity. Thus understood, formation is no longer only a teaching period in preparation for vows but also represents a theological way of thinking of consecrated life which is in itself a never-ending formation ‘sharing in the work of the Father who, through the Spirit, fashions in the heart the inner attitudes of the Son’” (Instruction *Starting Afresh from Christ*, n. 15).

In the way you deem most appropriate, venerable Brothers, please convey to your communities of

consecrated men and women, independently of the cloistered or apostolic service they carry out, the deep gratitude of the Pope. He remembers each and every one in his prayers, and especially the elderly and the sick, those who are passing through moments of crisis and solitude, those who are suffering and feel bewildered and also the young men and women who knock at the door of their houses today and ask to be able to dedicate themselves to Jesus Christ in the radicalism of the Gospel.

Now, as I invoke the heavenly protection of Mary, the perfect model of consecration to Christ, I once again express to you my fraternal esteem and impart to you a propitiatory Apostolic Blessing, which I extend to all the faithful entrusted to your pastoral solicitude.

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