



The Holy See

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

*Consistory Hall, Papal Residence of Castel Gandolfo
Thursday, 8 September 2011*

Dear Brother Bishops,

I offer you a warm fraternal welcome on the occasion of your visit *ad Limina Apostolorum*, a further occasion to deepen the communion that exists between the Church in India and the See of Peter, and an opportunity to rejoice in the universality of the Church. I wish to thank Cardinal Oswald Gracias for his kind words offered on your behalf and in the name of those entrusted to your pastoral care. My cordial greetings also go to the priests, the men and women Religious, and laity whom you shepherd. Please assure them of my prayers and solicitude.

The Church in India is blessed with a multitude of institutions which are intended to be expressions of the love of God for humanity through the charity and example of the clergy, religious and lay faithful who staff them. By means of her parishes, schools and orphanages, as well as her hospitals, clinics and dispensaries, the Church makes an invaluable contribution to the well-being not only of Catholics, but of society at large. Among these institutions in your region, a special place is held by the schools which are an outstanding witness to your commitment to the education and formation of our dear young people. The efforts made by the whole Christian community to prepare the young citizens of your noble country to build a more just and prosperous society have long been a hallmark of the Church in your Dioceses and throughout India. In helping the spiritual, intellectual and moral faculties of their students to mature, Catholic schools should continue to develop a capacity for sound judgment and introduce them to the heritage bequeathed to them by former generations, thus fostering a sense of values and preparing their pupils for a happy and productive life (cf. *Gravissimum Educationis*, 5). I encourage you to continue to pay close attention to the quality of instruction in the schools present in your Dioceses, to ensure that

they be genuinely Catholic and therefore capable of passing on those truths and values necessary for the salvation of souls and the up-building of society.

Of course, Catholic schools are not the only means by which the Church seeks to instruct and to edify her people in intellectual and moral truth. As you know, all of the Church's activities are meant to glorify God and fill his people with the truth that sets us free (cf. *Jn* 8:32). This saving truth, at the heart of the deposit of faith, must remain the foundation of all the Church's endeavours, proposed to others always with respect but also without compromise. The capacity to present the truth gently but firmly is a gift to be nurtured especially among those who teach in Catholic institutes of higher education and those who are charged with the ecclesial task of educating seminarians, religious or the lay faithful, whether in theology, catechetical studies or Christian spirituality. Those who teach in the name of the Church have a particular obligation faithfully to hand on the riches of the tradition, in accordance with the Magisterium and in a way that responds to the needs of today, while students have the right to receive the fullness of the intellectual and spiritual heritage of the Church. Having received the benefits of a sound formation and dedicated to charity in truth, the clergy, religious and lay leaders of the Christian community will be better able to contribute to the growth of the Church and the advancement of Indian society. The various members of the Church will then bear witness to the love of God for all humanity as they enter into contact with the world, providing a solid Christian testimony in friendship, respect and love, and striving not to condemn the world but to offer it the gift of salvation (cf. *Jn* 3:17). Encourage those involved in education, whether priests, religious or laity, to deepen their faith in Jesus Christ, crucified and risen from the dead. Enable them to reach out to their neighbours that, by their word and example, they may more effectively proclaim Christ as the Way, the Truth and the Life (cf. *Jn* 14:6).

A significant role of witness to Jesus Christ is carried out in your country by men and women religious, who are the often unsung heroes of the Church's vitality locally. Above and beyond their apostolic labours, however, religious and the lives they lead are a source of spiritual fruitfulness for the entire Christian community. As they open themselves to the grace of God, religious men and women inspire others to respond with trust, humility and joy to the invitation of the Lord to follow him.

In this regard, my Brother Bishops, I know that you are aware of the many factors which inhibit spiritual and vocational growth, particularly among young people. Yet we know that it is Jesus Christ alone who responds to our deepest longings, and who gives true meaning to our lives. Only in him can our hearts truly find rest. Continue, therefore, to speak to young people and to encourage them to consider seriously the consecrated or priestly life; speak with parents about their indispensable role in encouraging and supporting such vocations; and lead your people in prayer to the Lord of the harvest, that he may send many more labourers into this harvest (cf. *Mt* 9:38).

With these thoughts, dear Brother Bishops, I renew to you my sentiments of affection and esteem. I commend all of you to the intercession of Mary, Mother of the Church. Assuring you of my prayers for you and for those entrusted to your pastoral care, I am pleased to impart my Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of grace and peace in the Lord.

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