



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE BENEDICT XVI
TO THE BISHOPS OF THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE
OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA AND SOLOMON ISLANDS
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT***

Saturday, 9 June 2012

Dear Brother Bishops,

I offer you a warm fraternal welcome on the occasion of your visit *ad Limina Apostolorum*, and I thank Archbishop John Ribat for his kind words on behalf of the whole of the Bishops Conference of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands. This gathering is a privileged opportunity to express our communion in the one Church of Christ. Through you I send warm greetings to the priests, the men and women religious and all those entrusted to your pastoral care. Please assure them of my prayers for their continued growth in faith, hope and charity.

I would like to commend your efforts to “tend the flock of God that is your charge” (1 Pet 5:2). The attention you give to those under your pastoral care has been particularly noteworthy in the way you provide for the basic needs of the poor, the marginalized and the sick – especially those suffering from HIV/AIDS – through the work of your diocesan agencies. Another important part of your pastoral ministry is exercised when you speak publicly as an objective moral voice on behalf of those in need. When the Church voices her concern in the public square, she does so legitimately and in order to contribute to the common good, not proposing concrete political solutions, but rather helping to “purify and shed light upon the application of reason to the discovery of objective moral principles” (*Address at Westminster Hall*, 17 September 2010). Such principles are accessible to all through right reason and are necessary for the just ordering of civil society. In view of this, I encourage you to continue to dialogue and to work with the civil authorities so that the Church may be free to speak and to provide services for the common good in a manner fully consonant with Gospel values.

I note from your reports that you are initiating various pastoral efforts which have as their common element the evangelization of culture. This is of great importance since the human person can “achieve true and full humanity only by means of culture” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 53). We also observe the essential role of culture in salvation history, since the Triune God gradually revealed himself in time, culminating in the sending of his only Son, who himself was born into a particular culture. On the other hand, while acknowledging the respective contribution of each culture and at times calling upon its resources in fulfilling her mission, the Church has been sent to preach the Gospel to all nations, transcending man-made boundaries. In the work of evangelization then, my Brother Bishops, continue to apply the eternal truths of the Gospel to the customs of the people whom you serve, in order to build upon the positive elements already present and to purify others when necessary. In this way, you play your part in the Church’s mission to lead people of every nation, race and language to Jesus Christ the Saviour in whom we find revealed the fullness and truth of humanity (cf. *ibid*).

When speaking about this aspect of evangelization, the family has a key role to play, since it is the basic unit of human society and the first place where faith and culture are appropriated. Although society has recognized the important role of the family throughout history, particular attention needs to be given at the present time to the religious, social and moral goods of fidelity, equality and mutual respect that must exist between husband and wife. The Church tirelessly proclaims that the family is based on the natural institution of marriage between a man and a woman, and in the case of baptized Christians, it is a covenant which has been raised by Christ to the supernatural level of a sacrament, through which husband and wife participate in the love of God as they become one flesh, pledging to love and respect each other while remaining open to God’s gift of children. In this regard, I commend your efforts to give pastoral priority to the evangelization of marriage and the family in accordance with Catholic moral teaching. As you continue the centenary celebrations of the birth of Blessed Peter To Rot, who shed his blood in defence of the sanctity of marriage, I encourage all married couples to look to his example of courage and thus help others to see the family as a gift from God and the privileged environment where children “are enabled to be born with dignity, and to grow and develop in an integral manner” (*Homily*, 9 July 2006).

The work of evangelization involves all members of the Church of Christ. Mindful that Bishops, like the Apostles, “are sent to their Dioceses as the prime witnesses to the Risen Christ” (*Ecclesia in Oceania*, 19), make every effort to provide proper formation and catechetical programmes for the clergy, men and women religious, and the lay faithful so that they may be strong and joyful witnesses of the faith they profess as members of the Catholic Church. A properly catechized laity and well formed clergy and religious, “like a wise man who built his house upon the rock” (*Mt* 7:24), will be equipped to resist the temptations of the secular world and will be wise enough not to be deceived by attempts to convert them to overly simplistic versions of Christianity that are often based solely on false promises of material prosperity. While recognizing the importance of developing and maintaining formal programmes, I encourage you to remember that a key element

for effective formation and catechetical programmes is the example of holy witnesses who, by “doing the will of God in everything ... wholeheartedly devote themselves to the glory of God and to the service of neighbour” (*Lumen Gentium*, 40). These witnesses and those they teach, with your guidance and support, will help to ensure that the Church in your countries will continue to be an effective instrument of evangelization, attracting those who do not yet know Christ and inspiring those who have become lukewarm in their faith.

Finally, my Brother Bishops, it is my hope that your visit to the Successor of Peter and to the tombs of the Apostles will strengthen your resolve to be protagonists of the new evangelization, especially during the upcoming Year of Faith. I also pray that your efforts will bear fruit, so that the kingdom of God may continue to grow in the portion of the Lord’s vineyard entrusted to your pastoral care. Commending you to the intercession of Mary, Mother of the Church, and assuring you of my affection and prayers for you and your people, I willingly impart my Apostolic Blessing.

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