



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS
TO THE BISHOPS OF THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE OF SPAIN
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

*Consistory Hall
Monday, 3 March 2014*

Dear Brothers,

I thank the President of the Bishops' Conference of Spain for the words he addressed to me on your behalf and which express your firm resolve faithfully to serve the People of God on pilgrimage in Spain, where the Word of God took root very early and bore the fruit of harmony, culture and holiness. You desire to underline this especially through the upcoming celebration of the fifth centenary of the Birth of St Teresa of Jesus, the first woman Doctor of the Church.

You are now living through the difficult experience of the indifference of many of the baptized and you have to face a mundane culture which relegates God to private life and which excludes him from the public sector, it is opportune not to forget your history. We learn from history that divine grace cannot be extinguished and that the Holy Spirit continues to work in today's reality with generosity. Let us trust in Him always and in the many things which are sown in the hearts of those who are entrusted to our pastoral care (cf. Apostolic Exhortation [*Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 68](#)).

Bishops are entrusted with the task of making these seeds sprout with the courageous and true proclamation of the Gospel, of following attentively their growth by example, education and closeness, and of harmonizing them in the fullness of "the Lord's vineyard", from which no one is excluded.

Therefore, dear brothers, spare no effort in opening new paths to the Gospel to reach the hearts of all, so that they may discover what dwells within them: Christ as Friend and Brother.

It will not be difficult to find these paths if we follow the footsteps of the Lord, who “came not to be served but to serve” (Mk 10:45); who was humbly able to respect God’s time and the development of every person with patience and without the fear of taking the first step to approach them. He teaches us to listen to everyone heart-to-heart, tenderly and mercifully, and to search for what truly unites and helps us in edifying one another.

In this search it is important for the Bishop not to feel alone, nor to believe himself to be alone, and to understand that also the flock to which is entrusted to him is sensitive to the things of God. His closest collaborators especially, priests: for their close contact to the faithful with their daily needs and concerns; consecrated people: for their rich spiritual experience and their missionary and apostolic dedication in numerous areas; and the laity who, in many different areas of life and according to their abilities, spread the witness and the mission of the Church (cf. Second Ecumenical Vatican Council Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, n. 33).

At the same time, at the present moment, in which the mediation of the faith is increasingly scarce and difficulties in its transmission are not lacking, it is necessary to place your Churches in a true state of permanent mission in order to call back those who have strayed and to strengthen the faith, especially in children. To this end do not stop paying special attention to the process of initiation to Christian life. The faith is not a mere cultural patrimony but a gift, a gift that comes from the personal encounter with Jesus and from the free and joyful acceptance of the new life that he offers us. This requires ceaseless proclamation and creative energy so that the believer may be consistently in the condition of being a child of God which he or she received through Baptism.

Reawakening and revitalizing a sincere faith promotes marriage preparation and accompanying families whose vocation it is to be the birth place of living together in love, as the fundamental cell of society, where life is passed on, and as the domestic Church, where faith is molded and lived. An evangelized family is a precious agent of evangelization, especially because it radiates the wonders that God has worked in it. Moreover, by nature the family is a space of generosity, it promotes the emergence of vocations to the *sequela* of the Lord in the priesthood and consecrated life.

Last year you published the document *Vocaciones sacerdotales para el siglo XXI*, thus demonstrating the interests of your particular Churches in the vocations apostolate. This is an aspect which a Bishop must place as an absolute priority in his heart, remembering it in prayer, by insisting on the selection of candidates and preparing groups of good formation leaders and competent teachers.

Finally, I would like to underline that love and service to the poor are a sign of the Kingdom of God that Jesus came to bring (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 48). I know well that in recent years your *Caritas* — and other charitable works of the Church — have earned great recognition from believers and non-believers. This makes me very happy and I ask the Lord that

this may be a reason to draw closer to the source of love, to Christ who “went about doing good and healing” all, the oppressed (Acts 10:38), and also to his Church who is mother and will never forget the neediest of her children. Therefore I invite you to express esteem and closeness to those who place their talents and hands at the service of “the programme of the Good Samaritan, the programme of Jesus” (Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, 31b).

Dear brothers, now that you are meeting in your *ad limina* visit to manifest the bonds of communion with the Bishop of Rome (cf. Second Ecumenical Council Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, n. 22), I would like to thank you wholeheartedly for your service to the holy people faithful to God. Go forth with hope. Put yourselves at the head of the spiritual and missionary renewal of your particular Churches, as brothers and pastors of your faithful, as well as those who are not or who have forgotten they were. To this end, sincere and fraternal collaboration within the Episcopal Conference, as well as mutual support in the search for the most suitable way to act will be a great help to you.

I ask you, please, to convey to your beloved children of Spain a special greeting from the Pope, who entrusts them to the maternal care of the Most Holy Virgin Mary, and who begs them to pray for him and imparts his blessing to them.