



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
TO THE BISHOPS OF NEW ZEALAND
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT***

Monday, 13 November 1978

Dear Brothers in our Lord Jesus Christ,

I SHALL ALWAYS be grateful to God for having given me the opportunity to visit New Zealand. Even though my stay among you in 1973 was a brief one, it gave me great joy. Be assured that my memories of these days are still vivid, and that they constitute one more reason for me to do everything in my power to be of service to your beloved people in the Gospel of Christ. And today it is my hope, with God's grace, to fulfil my papal ministry towards you, my brother Bishops as Successor of Peter I desire to confirm you in the Apostle's profession of faith, so that you in turn may continue with fresh vigour and new strength to preach Jesus Christ the Son of the living God, and to assist your people to realize to the full their Christian dignity and to attain their final destiny

The Second Vatican Council wanted to avoid every semblance of triumphalism in the Church. In this regard it pointed out that Christ calls his Church "to that continual reformation of which she always has need, insofar as she is an institution of people here on earth". The Council never had any intention of claiming that the Church always has at hand facile solutions to individual problems; it did, however, positively wish to emphasize the teaching role of the Church: the fact that she is endowed with light from God, in order to offer solutions to problems that affect humanity. The Council desired that through the preaching of the Gospel all people would be illumined by the light of Christ that shines on the face of the Church.

The Church truly reflects the light of Christ, and from Christ she has received a message that answers the fundamental aspirations of the human heart. In the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the modern world we are reminded that "Bishops, who are assigned the task of ruling the Church of God, should, together with their priests, so preach the message of Christ that all the earthly activities of the faithful will be bathed in the light of the Gospel". As Bishops, you are constantly trying to fulfil this role of pastoral service: to bring the treasure of God's word to bear relevantly on the life of each member of the flock, to bring the light of Christ into the lives of individuals and communities.

I wish to assure you today that I am deeply aware of the bonds that unite us in the Church and in her hierarchical communion. You have my prayers and support for all your apostolic labours. In particular, I am at one with you in your mission of defending human life in all its stages. In all your catechetical endeavours, in all your work for Catholic education, you can count on the solidarity of the universal Church. What an important work it is to provide children with Catholic schools, in which they can "grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ"! What a great challenge it is for a Bishop to guard the deposit of Christian doctrine, so that each new generation can receive the fullness of the apostolic faith! And to what deep paternal sensitivity and spiritual leadership the Bishop is called, in order effectively to associate the whole Diocese with himself in exercising the collective vigilance that is needed for maintaining true Catholic education! Through word and example and prayer, the Bishop must inspire each member of the Christian family to do his or her part, so that the light of Christ will touch all people in each vital aspect of modern living.

Despite difficulties and obstacles we must never falter in our commitment to work for the re-establishment of Christian unity, according to the ardent desire of the heart of Christ. The orientation of the Ecumenical Council is decisive, and its call for conversion and holiness of life is even more imperative today than it was fourteen years ago when this appeal was made: "Let all Christ's faithful remember that the more purely they strive to live according to the Gospel, the more they are fostering and even practising Christian unity". The great ecumenical heritage of the Council was succinctly summarized by Paul VI in the closing lines of his testament, which I propose once again to your prayerful meditation and to that of the whole Church: "let the work of drawing closer to our separated Brethren be carried on, with much understanding, with much patience, with great love; but without deviation from the true Catholic doctrine". This delicate work is beyond human power; only the Holy Spirit can bring it to completion. With the intensity of love we must pray to the Father: "thy Kingdom come, thy will be done".

With these reflections I reiterate my affection in Christ Jesus for all the Catholic people and for all your fellow-citizens in New Zealand. My special love is with the poor, the sick, the suffering. I send a particular greeting to the Maori people, encouraging them to remain strong in faith and fervent in love.

My Apostolic Blessing "to all of you that are in Christ".