



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II TO THE BISHOPS OF HONDURAS ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT

Thursday, 23 November 1978

Venerated Brothers in the Episcopate,

After the individual meeting with each of you, today I have the pleasure of receiving collectively all the members of the Episcopate of Honduras, in the framework of the visit "ad limina Apostolorum" which you are carrying out in these days.

If during our preceding contact, we spoke of particular aspects of each of your dioceses, now I would like to deal with some subjects that affect the life of the Church in Honduras as a whole.

Through your words and the reports presented, I saw to my joy that evangelization work in Honduras has been intensified in the last few years and that religious practice has increased with it, while at the same time the religious formation of the people, particularly in certain sectors, has improved. These are reasons for hope, which at the same time make us think of the main difficulty that the Church meets with in your country, due to the scarcity of priests.

I am well aware that the Catholic laity of Honduras, God be thanked, has been becoming more and more aware of its responsibility within the Church, and is contributing positively to the ecclesial task of spreading the Gospel message. This contribution, which denotes a new maturity of Christian awareness in the laity, is very praiseworthy, and must continue and be intensified as far as possible.

But it must not make us forget the irreplaceable and specific place that priests have in the sanctification of the people of God, appointed as they are by the Lord "to hold in the community of the faithful the sacred power of Order, that of offering sacrifice and forgiving sins, and to exercise the priestly office publicly on behalf of men in the name of Christ" (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 2).

It is a question of vital importance for the Church. From it is derived the precise duty of giving absolute priority to the fostering of vocations to the priesthood, and likewise to the consecrated life. It is a great task which must be undertaken with all diligence, with the subsequent training of those who have been called, to a strong sense of faith and service for the world today.

To create an environment propitious to the flourishing of vocations, the ecclesial community will have to offer a testimony of life in conformity with the essential values of the Gospel. In this way they will be able to arouse generous souls, directed towards complete commitment to Christ and others. With confidence in the Lord and in the reward promised to those who serve him faithfully.

Thinking of your priests, I wish to urge you with special interest to dedicate particular pastoral care to your collaborators, so that they may always keep alive their own priestly identity and the ecclesial donation they have made. Help them with your example and words to be well aware of the greatness of their task as continuers of Christ's mission of salvation, and of the necessity of adapting themselves better and better to it.

That will require a constant effort not to conform to this world (cf. Rom 12:2), in order to revive every day the grace they possess by means of the imposition of hands (cf. 2 Tim 1:6), and to live for Christ, who lives in them (cf. Gal 2:20). Only in this spirit of faith will priests be fully conscious of the sublime value of their state and mission.

In the exercise of the sacred ministry, to give full efficacy to the work of evangelization, it is essential to maintain close communion between bishops and priests. The former, in a spirit of true charity and exercising their authority in a attitude of service (cf. Mt 20:28); the latter, in faithfulness to the guidelines received from their Ordinary, aware that they form "one family of which the bishop is the father" (*Christus Dominus*, 28). For that reason I call on your priests to realize that nothing stable or constructive can be obtained in their ministry, if they claim to exercise it outside communion with their own bishop; far less, if against him. Not to mention the harm and confusion that such attitudes create among the faithful.

Beloved Brothers: I would like to be able to deal here with so many other questions. Let my word of encouragement in your pastoral action suffice for the present. On returning to your country, transmit this word of the Pope's encouragement to priests and seminarians, to religious priests and brothers—such an important part of your collaborators—to Sisters and to the laity. Take to them the affectionate greeting of the Pope, who remembers them in his prayers, encourages them in their respective ecclesial commitment, and willingly blesses them.

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