



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO BISHOPS OF CANADA
ON THEIR «AD LIMINA APOSTOLORUM» VISIT**

Friday, 30 September 1983

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

1. In this hour of collegial unity, we are experiencing together *a living hope in our Lord Jesus Christ*. It is he who is the Supreme Pastor of the whole Church, “which he obtained with his own blood” (*Act.* 20, 28), and which he calls his own when he says: “. . . and on this rock I will build *my* Church” (*Matth.* 16, 18). As Bishops we are called upon to manifest our confidence in the redeeming power of this blood and in the unlimited efficacy of the entire Paschal Mystery. And, as Bishops assembled in the name of Jesus, we believe that we have a special title to be reassured of his presence in our midst (cfr. *ibid.* 18, 20). In a word, it is “Christ Jesus our hope” (*1 Tim.* 1, 1) who lives in us, and who through us, by word and sacrament, continues to extend his Redemption to the world.

2. I wish at this time *to praise the power of the Paschal Mystery* that has been at work for many years *in your local Churches*. It is a power that was unleashed among you through the generous, indeed heroic, efforts of succeeding generations of apostles and missionaries. At the basis of all evangelizing zeal there was a clear understanding and faithful acceptance of Christ’s command: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you . . .” (*Matth.* 28, 20). Immense sacrifices have been made, and are still being made, to fulfill Christ’s command, so that the Good News can be heard and accepted, and so that the power of Christ’s death and Resurrection can penetrate human hearts, build up the community of the Church and radically modify the criteria for human actions.

3. In the life of the Church, *the actuation of the Paschal Mystery is intimately linked by Christ’s will*

to the *Sacrament of Baptism* and to the other sacraments of Christian initiation. For each Christian, Baptism is a sacramental introduction to the Church that is herself the sacrament of salvation and the household of the faith. Moreover, from the Council of Trent we know that Baptism is not only a sign of faith but also a cause of faith (DENZ.-SCHÖN., 1606).

Baptism is of supreme importance for our people for many reasons. It is the sacrament of interior enlightenment, spiritual liberation and new life. Through Baptism, our people are given a vital participation in the redemptive death and Resurrection of Christ and are called to “walk in newness of life” (*Rom. 6, 4*). *Baptism is also the source of all the moral responsibilities incumbent on Christians*. It is by reason of their Baptism that they must consider themselves “dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus” (*Rom. 6, 11*). Through Baptism the very power of the Paschal Mystery is sacramentally brought to bear on human weakness and sinfulness, so that Christ’s victory over sin and death actually enters into individual lives and triumphs in individual hearts.

4. *God’s gift of Baptism is the basis of all Christian dignity*, because it is the origin of incorporation into Christ. As Bishops we know how pastorally important it is to remind our people of their dignity, to speak to them about the hope in which they must anchor their lives, and to call them to place all their confidence in the power of the Crucified and Risen Saviour. Precisely because they have put on Christ in Baptism, been incorporated into him and become his Body, our people have every reason to be buoyed up in hope and by the awareness of their Baptismal identity and Christian dignity. God wills that we pastors of his Church should proclaim this identity and this dignity just as Peter did when he told the faithful: “you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people” (*1 Petr. 2, 9*).

5. As our people begin to realize more and more the meaning of Baptism in their lives, our explanation of other truths takes on greater cogency. The Apostles themselves have given us examples of how to appeal to the ecclesial communities. On our part *we can explain so many things more effectively by reason of our incorporation into Christ through Baptism*: the urgency of worshipping the Father together with Christ, who wills that the members of his Body pray with him; the special need to practise chastity so as not to defile the Body of Christ; the importance for members of Christ to assist other members in need; and the value of human suffering offered in the name of Christ. Yes, everything in fact is different and enriched from the perspective of Baptismal consecration and incorporation into Christ. There is a new vision of the world, a new need for diakonia, new exigencies for individuals and for communities, and a new call for a social action that takes its origin and finds its term in the Body of Christ.

6. *Baptism is the origin of an ever greater shared-responsibility in the Church and for the Church*. Not only are Bishops collegially responsible for situations and needs beyond the limits of their own ecclesial communities, but the laity too are co-responsible in their own way for the well-being of other parts of the Body of Christ, indeed for the well-being of the whole Church. In a great nation such as Canada, with vast Dioceses that have special needs of evangelization and catechesis,

there must exist a special solidarity based both on Episcopal collegiality and on that general shared-responsibility which is an exigency of Baptism. All Christ's faithful must be concerned for the future of the Church throughout Canada; everyone must think about transmitting the faith, about bringing the Gospel to the young, to the unchurched, to the poor, the suffering and to all those in need.

7. The Sacrament of Baptism is, moreover, *the foundation of all community in the Church*. Together with the word of God which is actuated in it - and is supremely actuated in the Eucharist - Baptism is the cause of the cohesiveness of the fraternal fabric of the Church. In its radical relationship to the Eucharist, which only priests can effect, Baptism bears strongly on the life of priests and on all the activities that they perform as builders and servants of community-sacramental community.

8. Baptism is essential to the Church's mission as explained by Christ - to teach everything he taught and to baptize - and it is at *the basis of all mission in the Church*. The zealous efforts of the Canadian Bishops to promote the lay apostolate are mandated by the Second Vatican Council, which considers the lay apostolate as a participation in the saving mission of the Church, and states: "Through Baptism and Confirmation all are commissioned to that apostolate by the Lord himself" (*Lumen Gentium*, 33). It is through the awareness of the importance of Baptism that all catechists find encouragement, all lay movements discover their identity and all lay spirituality finds its authentic expressions. Indeed, the religious life itself discovers not only its specific identity in relationship to the Sacrament of Baptism.

9. From these viewpoints and from so many others it is evident that the Church regards Baptism as a great gift of God. It is a gift treasured by the People of God and a gift about which the Magisterium has spoken for centuries, leaving the Church a profound body of teaching to be reflected upon and to be proclaimed. Among its rich content is *the Church's teaching in infant Baptism* which deserves our personal pastoral attention. This teaching was summarized in 1980 in a document of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which reiterated the Church's teaching on the necessity of Baptism, also for children, and on the relationship of Baptism and faith. At the same time it offered principles and guidelines governing the pastoral practice of the Baptism of infants. The Church's esteem for this sacrament and her teaching on its necessity for salvation explain why the new Code of Canon Law speaks of the obligation of parents to see that their infants are baptized within the first weeks after birth.

10. Venerable and dear Brothers, I have chosen to reflect with you today on the Sacrament of Baptism because I am convinced that this consideration can deeply affect your pastoral ministry. There are many other issues and problems that you must deal with directly and indirectly. But a fresh emphasis on the importance of Baptism, in accordance with the Second Vatican Council, can, with God's grace, have great effects on your local Churches. With *a new awareness of their Baptismal identity and Christian dignity*, the faithful are able to face the challenges of Christian

living with renewed confidence and hope. To help engender this renewed confidence and hope is something extremely relevant to Christian living and to our episcopal ministry.

And as we endeavour to expend ourselves for the flock entrusted to our pastoral care, let us strive *to create new attitudes among God's people*-attitudes that beget hope and confidence and incite the faithful to persevere in the call of their Baptism to share in the Paschal Mystery of Christ. With Saint Peter we proclaim: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (*1 Petr.* 1, 3). A new birth, a new life, a new hope through the action of the Holy Spirit! This is the message of Baptism which we proclaim in Christ and in his Church.

11. J'ajoute un mot en français - puisque plusieurs d'entre vous sont francophones ou de diocèses francophones -, pour évoquer la question des vocations sacerdotales et religieuses, sans reprendre tout ce que j'ai eu l'occasion de dire a vos confrères de la région atlantique. La moisson est abondante, et les ouvriers risquent d'être trop peu nombreux, pour le ministère irremplaçable du prêtre, pour la formation et l'accompagnement spirituel des laïcs, pour être signes de l'absolu du Royaume de Dieu. Or l'Esprit Saint ne peut manquer de susciter des vocations, a la mesure de la foi et des besoins des fidèles. Continuez donc, chers Frères, a mettre tout en œuvre, auprès des enfants et des jeunes, de leurs parents, des écoles, des séminaires, ou dans la formation permanente des adultes, pour éveiller ces vocations, les fortifier, les mener a maturité. Il y faut des moyens pédagogiques adaptés, il y faut un climat de prière, il y faut le témoignage des prêtres, des religieux, des religieuses, heureux de se consacrer totalement au service du Christ!

Je prie l'Esprit Saint de vous combler de ses dons de lumière et de force, vous et ceux qui collaborent avec vous. Je le prie avec Notre-Dame du Rosaire. Et je vous bénis de tout cœur.

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