



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS OF THE ENGLISH PROVINCE OF LIVERPOOL
ON OCCASION OF THEIR «AD LIMINA» VISIT Saturday, 30 May 1987**

Dear Brothers in our Lord Jesus Christ,

1. I CORDIALLY WELCOME you on the occasion of your *ad limina* visit. Your presence here is a reminder of the universality and diversity of the People of God, and serves to strengthen the bonds of unity, charity and peace which link us together in pastoral concern for the universal Church as well as for your local Churches. (Cfr. [*Lumen Gentium*](#), 22)

During this time of preparation for the coming Synod of Bishops, our thoughts naturally turn to *the role and mission of the laity of your dioceses*. I know them to be people who are strongly rooted in their Catholic faith and in devotion to the See of Peter. That faith is built upon the witness of martyrs, like those who are to be beatified next November. It is also a faith that is deriving new energy from the teachings of the Second Vatican Council. The vibrant life of your Churches is a tribute to the good example and hard work of you the bishops and of your clergy: you have taken to heart the admonition of the Council to "recognize and promote the dignity and responsibility of the laity in the Church". (Cfr. [*Lumen Gentium*](#), 37) I commend you for this leadership, which has earned you the love, respect and ready collaboration of your people. 2. *The dignity and responsibility of the lay apostolate* are intimately joined to the purpose of the Church's mission as it is described in the Conciliar Decree [*Apostolicam Actuositatem*](#), namely, "to spread the kingdom of Christ over all the earth for the glory of God the Father, to make all men and women partakers in redemption and salvation, and through them to establish the right relationship of the entire world to Christ". (Cfr. [*Apostolicam Actuositatem*](#), 2) The Decree goes on to say that this mission embraces both our eternal salvation and the renewal of the whole temporal order. (Cfr. *Ibid.* 5) This fundamentally religious mission is fruitful only to the extent that it is rooted in Christ, who says: "I am the vine, you are the branches... apart from me you can do nothing". (Cfr. *Jo.* 15, 5) *Union with Christ* is initiated in Baptism and is sustained by the other sacraments, especially the Eucharist, and by prayer, self-denial and the practice of the virtues. It is likewise sustained by the devotional practices that have been such an important part of the Church's life. Prayers like the

Rosary and Stations of the Cross, together with pilgrimages and popular devotions which express our love for God, the Blessed Virgin and the angels and saints—all of these enrich our spiritual life and should be encouraged in harmony with the reform of the sacred liturgy. The coming Marian Year provides a special opportunity to express and to renew the devotional life of the local Churches.

3. It is Christ's will that the life of a true disciple be marked by an *active love and service of neighbour*. This love can bring about a transformation of the world, and it stands as a sign of the Kingdom to come. The people of your dioceses manifest this love and service of others by their generous performance of family, social and professional duties and by active involvement in the development of society, as well as more direct forms of Church work. Individually, some of them are prominent in public life. Collectively, as a Church community, they work in harmony with their pastors *to bring Christ to the world of work and to those in special need*, the poor and suffering, and nowadays especially the unemployed and ethnic minorities. They are generous in providing social and charitable assistance both at home and abroad, by supporting the foreign mission as well as their own parishes and schools. Under your leadership and guidance they are reaching out to other Churches and Ecclesial Communities, especially their Anglican brothers and sisters. At this is undertaken with an effectiveness that belies their actual numbers. They are truly like a leaven in the society of which they are a part. (Cfr. *Lumen Gentium*, 31)

4. Given the great dignity and responsibility attached to the apostolate of the laity in the world, it is especially important that we who are pastors seek ways to deepen the faith of lay people and to encourage them to persevere in living the Christian life. The faithful are "salt and light" for the world (Cfr. *Matth.* 5, 13-14) to the extent that they themselves have a solid understanding of the saving truths of revelation believed and taught by the Church, and an ever deeper awareness of *the spiritual dimension of their ordinary activities in the temporal sphere*, whether exalted or humble. It is a matter of recognizing the transcendent in the otherwise mundane activities of home and parish, of the workplace and school – a matter of recognizing that all we say and do as believers has one supreme goal, namely, holiness. *Lumen Gentium* describes it in the following way: "... all Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of love, and by this holiness a more human manner of life is fostered also in earthly society" (Cfr. *Lumen Gentium*, 40). In a materialistic and secularized world, it is easy for this supreme goal to be forgotten if faith is not constantly nourished by preaching and instruction and doctrinal maturity and clarifies our sense of mission.

5. For this reason, I wish to encourage you in your efforts to provide *Christian formation, pastoral guidance, and training for the apostolate*. These begin in the home with the family and continue on the parochial and diocesan levels. They involve education programmes and opportunities for spiritual reflection and renewal. I commend you and your people in particular for the pastoral care extended to those preparing for marriage, to families, single parents, and to youth. I also wish to mention the *Catholic schools* and all those associated with them. These schools have a special mission to provide formation and training which is truly Catholic and which reflects the Church's supreme goal of personal holiness for the sanctification of the world. *Young people* should be the object of our special pastoral concern since today society and culture offer them so many empty promises and so little guidance for living a fruitful life. They must be able to find Christ and his Gospel within the Church as a convincing yet challenging

answer to their questions. Certainly, the increased number of the faithful who are exercising non-ordained ministries in parishes and ecclesial communities reflects their desire to participate more actively in the spiritual and sacramental life of the Church. It is important, however, not to obscure the specific vocation of the laity, which is to bear witness to the Gospel in the heart of society and culture. Where these *non-ordained ministries* are effective in building up the local Church in faith and service, their growth should be properly programmed and they should always be preceded by adequate training of those involved. 6. As *Apostolicam Actuositatem* reminds us, with the passing of the years the grace of God increases and so allows each one of us to gain a clearer view of the talents which he has given us, and to exercise even more effectively the charisms we have received for the good of our brothers and sisters (Cfr. *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 30). We who are bishops, together with our clergy, are ourselves called to lifelong Christian formation. *Through conversion we too must grow to the fullness of maturity in holiness of life.* Dear brothers: I rejoice with you at *all the gifts which God has given to your local Churches.* I also share your concerns as shepherds who "tend the flock of God that is your charge" (Cfr. 1 *Petr.* 5,2). May the Lord continue to bless you and your clergy, religious and laity, as you seek to grow in holiness for your own salvation and the salvation of the world. Commending you all to Mary, Mother of Christ and Mother of the Church, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.

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