



The Holy See

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

Saturday 9 April, 1988

Dear brother Bishops,

1. I am pleased to welcome you here on the occasion of your *ad limina* visit, which brings us together during this joyful season of new life in Christ, risen from the dead. Through you I also wish to greet all the clergy, Religious and laity who, together with their Bishops, constitute the various particular Churches in New Zealand.

I am happy to note the presence of Bishop Max Mariu, whose recent ordination to the episcopacy is a source of special joy to the Maori people of your country. Through the ministry which he has just begun, may all the Catholic people of New Zealand be even more perfectly united in the one family of faith, hope and love.

I wish to reflect for a moment on the *ecclesial significance* which this *ad limina* visit has for the local Churches in your country. Your long journey to Rome to honour the memory and to invoke the intercession of the blessed Apostles Peter and Paul serves as a reminder that "as fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" we are "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord"^[1]. We are grateful to God for this *apostolic foundation* in which Saints Peter and Paul have such a hallowed place. We also thank God for the Good News of salvation that we have received as a gift through the heroic preaching and Christian witness of those who have gone before us in faith. I rejoice with you and the faithful of your Dioceses in a special way this year as you celebrate the memory of New Zealand's first Bishop, Jean Baptiste Pompallier, whose ministry as a successor of the Apostles

laid the foundation for full ecclesial life in your country one hundred and fifty years ago.

The significance of your *ad limina* visit, however, is not rooted only in the past. You are also here to visit the Successor of Peter, in order to strengthen the bonds of loving communion that bind your Churches to him, whom the Second Vatican Council recognizes as “Pastor of the whole Church”[2] and as “the perpetual and visible source and foundation of the unity of the Bishops and of the multitude of the faithful”[3]. By faithfully presenting to him, in a spirit of collegiality, the experiences of your pastoral ministry, you are endeavouring to ensure its authenticity[4]. He in turn wishes to strengthen all his brethren in the faith through a ministry that belongs *to the essence of each particular church* from *within*, and not from *outside*. In this Petrine service, willed by Christ and kept alive in the Church by the Holy Spirit, the Successor of Peter is called upon to promote the universality of the Church, to protect her legitimate variety, to guarantee her Catholic unity, to confirm his brother Bishops in their apostolic faith and ministry, and to preside over the whole assembly of charity[5].

The ecclesial significance of your visit, then, is one of *hierarchical communion*, which like so many spiritual realities present believers with a twofold challenge: first, to deepen constantly their own understanding and appreciation of this spiritual reality, and secondly, to bear witness to it in a secularized world. At a time when people can easily lose sight of *the spiritual dimension of life*, the Church seeks to live as one household of faith in an intimate communion that transcends by far the political economic, ethnic and other secular relationships that are part of social life. The Church strives in every time and place to impart to all her members a deeply spiritual understanding of their life and mission in and for the world. Without a profound understanding of the Church’s teaching on hierarchical communion our life and mission as the Church are diminished.

2. For that reason, I also wish to reflect with you on the *importance of doctrine* in the life of the Church. In the wake of the Second Vatican Council we may rejoice at the renewed awareness among our people that the Catholic faith is not limited to certain religious practices, and that faith must be put into action, especially at the service of justice and peace in the world. At the same time, as the Council also insists, we must build on the strong foundation of sound doctrine, which is none other than *the saving truth of Jesus Christ*. This truth is enshrined in the Creed and taught by the Magisterium; without it all our labours are in vain. As Saint Paul reminds us, “No other foundation can any one lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ”[6]. The challenge always facing the Church is to deepen our knowledge, understanding and love of this truth which transforms our minds and hearts. Only by *obedience to the truth* as proclaimed by the Church’s universal Magisterium can we fulfil our own mission in and for the world.

3. The whole People of God, and each of us, in response to Christ’s word, is called to be holy and to share in the Church’s mission. But the service of the word requires that particular attention be given to the intellectual and spiritual *formation of the clergy*, who are stewards of the mysteries of

God, and of the Religious, who by their consecration are called to build up the Church through the perfection of charity. The process of training begins in seminaries and houses of formation; it then continues through a lifelong process of personal study, prayer and reflection carried out in communion with the whole Church. Formation is *rooted in doctrine*, and must involve both the mind and the heart. It should lead a person not only to be well informed about the Church's teachings, but also to understand the way in which these teachings *fit together* and form the basis for the Church's structure and discipline. The goal of seminary formation is to deepen in candidates for the priesthood an appreciation of Catholic doctrine as proposed by the Magisterium so that their own teaching will be truly Catholic and express authentically the life and faith of the Church. Only then will the faithful find in their clergy and Religious, and learn from them, a profound *love for ecclesial unity and communion* and a clearer understanding of the mysteries of faith.

No less importantly, *the laity – especially the young* – must be taught the truths of the faith to which they are committed by their Baptism. We all know that sometimes people stray from the Church through indifference, weakness or alienation. Experience also shows that if, when they were young, they received a solid grounding *in Catholic doctrine, sacramental life and prayer*, they are more likely to return, with God's help, to the full practice of their faith.

Especially important in this regard are *Catholic schools*, in which young people must not only hear about Jesus Christ, but also learn a way of thinking and a way of life in harmony with his Gospel. This they will do with the help of teachers who do not hesitate to impart the Church's teaching in its fullness and who themselves witness to the faith through an authentic Christian life.

Indeed, all of God's people need to be nourished by sound teaching throughout their lives. All of us need to be challenged to deepen our spiritual life. I know that you share this concern, and I recommend special prudence in seeking ways to promote *spiritual renewal* among the faithful entrusted to your care.

An extremely important aspect of all spiritual renewal in the Catholic Church is the Sacrament of Penance. As I said in the Apostolic Exhortation "*Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*": "Every confessional is a special and blessed place from which, with divisions wiped away, there is born new and uncontaminated a reconciled individual – a reconciled world!"^[7]. The Church's discipline concerning individual confession and absolution as the ordinary means of celebrating the Sacrament is not a master of obedience alone. It is above all a question of fidelity to the will of our Lord Jesus Christ, as it is transmitted through the teaching of the Church^[8].

4. The Sacred Scriptures show that for many people the truth which Jesus preached was difficult to accept. "God so loved the world he gave his only Son"^[9], but the world receives the gift of redemption only through a change of heart – by turning away from sin – and through faith in what is unseen. We Christians are not exempt from this daily struggle to live in accordance with the new

creation which we have become by Baptism. We have only to think of Jesus' words about the Eucharist, about the Cross, about marriage, material wealth, and forgiveness to see how powerfully *he challenges our faith and morals*. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Church continues to preach the Gospel "in season and out of season", in all its fullness and with all its implications for the faith and morale of people today. Such a challenging message will be credible to non-believers and to those who are wavering in their faith only if there are Christians who are *well informed and strongly convinced* of their beliefs and who at the same time are *filled with love*. Only the greatest love enables us to proclaim the truth, even when it is painful or unpopular.

5. Solid doctrinal formation is also essential if *ecumenical efforts* are to be truly fruitful. In New Zealand dialogue between the various Churches and Ecclesial Communities can be fruitful. Such dialogue not only helps us to understand better our non-Catholic brothers and sisters, but also is a occasion to reflect more deeply on *our own Catholic identity* and on the doctrine and discipline that constitute that identity. Here again, responsible ecumenical attitudes require careful formation, especially among the clergy. As I have said on a previous occasion in addressing the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, this formation "must centre around a deepened understanding of the mystery of the Church, and lead to a clear knowledge of the Catholic principles of ecumenism. This is necessary in order to ensure that those who have responsibility for ecumenical work in the Catholic Church understand that ecumenical initiatives should be carried out under the guidance of the Bishops in close union with the Holy See, and giving full weight to the essential role of the latter in serving the unity of all"^[10].

6. And so, dear Brothers, once again I wish to *encourage* you in your witness to the full truth of Christ and the Gospel as it is lived and taught in the Church. During my Pastoral Visit to your country, I was privileged to witness firsthand what God's grace has accomplished in you. I commend you and your clergy, Religious and laity for all your efforts to respond generously to build up the Church as a community of holiness, justice and love. Today I invite you to do even more: to promote a sound understanding of the Church, to ensure liturgical renewal that is faithful to authentic principles and norms of Catholic worship, and to apply Catholic teaching in its fullness to social and cultural questions.

Following the example of the Mother of God, who kept and pondered in her heart everything relating to her divine Son, may each of you, and all the faithful of your Dioceses, grow in your love of the truth. I commend you to Mary's maternal care during this year dedicated to her, and I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.

[1] Cfr. *Eph. 2*, 19-21.

[2] *Lumen Gentium*, 22.

[3] *Ibid.* 23.

[4] Cfr. *Gal.* 2, 2.

[5] Cfr. *Lumen Gentium*, 13.

[6] *1 Cor.* 3, 11.

[7] Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, 31.

[8] Cfr. Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, 33.

[9] *Io.* 3, 16.

[10] Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Allocutio ad delegatos Commissionum Oecumenicarum Nationalium*, 5, die 27 apr. 1985: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, VIII, 1 (1985) 1140.

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