



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS OF FRANCE ON THEIR
"AD LIMINA APOSTOLORUM VISIT"**

Saturday, 5 April 1997

Your Eminence,

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

1. Welcome, Pastors of the Île-de-France. In this Easter season I am pleased to receive you during your pilgrimage *ad limina Apostolorum*. Your visit shows our communion in Christ for the sake of serving the Church, founded on the Apostles, the pillars of the Church, which seeks every day to be more faithful to the mission entrusted to the College of the Apostles under Peter's leadership.

I first thank Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger, Archbishop of Paris, for his presentation of your Apostolic Region. In addition, I would like to greet Bishop Olivier de Berranger, who recently succeeded the late Bishop Guy Deroubaix in Saint-Denis, France, and to assure him of my prayers for his new pastoral ministry. I am also pleased to welcome, together with the residential Bishops of the Île-de-France, Bishop Michel Dubost, Bishop of the French Army, who is responsible for preparing the World Youth Day.

More than 30 years have passed since the ancient Dioceses of Paris, Versailles and Meaux were restructured and five new Dioceses created, which by now have acquired their own identity. This does not prevent an organized collaboration between you at various levels, which is all the more timely for the vitality of the Christian communities, since the resources of various sectors are very unequal, especially as regards pastoral workers. Following the example of other great world metropolises, you aim at the greatest possible harmony in the co-ordination of ecclesial life, particularly necessary when a population is constantly on the move in the area. I am aware of the

enormity of your tasks in this active and varied region, where the positive contributions of contemporary society appear as numerous as its problems.

2. In the perspective of the Great Jubilee of the Redemption, an event for the whole Church, today I would like to stress certain aspects that will mark your ministry, by repeating several guidelines offered in the Apostolic Letter *Tertio millennio adveniente*. This is the first of the three preparatory years. In Paris and in the other Dioceses of your region, its high point will be *World Youth Day*, which I am grateful to you for enthusiastically accepting and preparing. Please express my gratitude to the priests, religious and laity, and most especially to all your country's young people, who are expending their energy to ensure that this world youth meeting goes smoothly. I am aware of the efforts they are making at the present time for the success of this important spiritual event. Tell them that the Pope trusts them, that he is pleased to come to Paris to encourage those who are called to build the Church of the next millennium.

This gathering, as I said in my Message to the world's young people to mark the *12th World Youth Day*, will be a "living icon of the Church". Under the sign of the Holy Year Cross, which will have been received by the youth of all the French Dioceses, attention will be focused on Christ. In answer to the questions of all these young people, taking up in their way the question asked by his two first disciples: "Teacher, where are you staying?" (Jn 1:38) — the Lord earnestly repeats his invitation to follow him and see, to stay with him and discover him more and more in his Body which is the Church. On this journey with Christ, young people will see that he alone can fulfil their aspirations and give them true happiness.

By organizing the World Youth Day, you will enable the pastors and faithful of the Île-de-France and of your whole country to have a living experience of the Church's communion through the members of the younger generations. Indeed, one of the appeals of the Great Jubilee we are preparing for is precisely the call to dialogue among the faithful of different nations, different spiritualities and different cultures. In this world where so many forms of communication are developing, do not the members of the universal Church need to know one another better and to progress in harmony since "all the members of the body, though many, are one body"? And St Paul adds: "So it is with Christ" (1 Cor 12:12). And we know that the Apostle of the Gentiles supports his exhortation to unity in diversity by exalting charity, the greatest of God's gifts (1 Cor 13:13).

3. The Jubilee "is meant to be a great prayer of praise and thanksgiving, especially for the gift of the Incarnation of the Son of God and of the Redemption which he accomplished" (*Tertio millennio adveniente*, n. 32). And the first year of preparation, centred on Jesus Christ, invites us *to strengthen our faith in the Redeemer* (cf. *ibid.*, n. 42). This is a providential opportunity to invite the faithful to contemplate the face of Christ and rediscover the sacraments and the ways of prayer. Interiorizing personal bonds with Christ is a necessary condition for accepting the Gospel way of life, which the Church must present. It is a question, day by day, of becoming more keenly aware

of the gifts of grace bestowed through Baptism, of totally accepting the presence of Christ who sanctifies those who have been “buried with him by Baptism” (Rom 6:4), so as to enter a new life.

In the guidelines set out for the preparation of the Great Jubilee, I indicated *Baptism* as the first of the sacraments to be rediscovered because it is the “basis of Christian living” (*Tertio millennio adveniente*, n. 41). Thus it is appropriate that young people will receive Baptism at the World Day. They will, as it were, represent their brothers and sisters who all over the world are involved in the adult catechumenate thanks to the support of parishes, chaplaincies and youth movements. Their presence and witness will encourage the great number of those who have been members of the Church from childhood to have a better idea of the gifts which have been showered upon them, of their status as Christians.

4. Do not spare your efforts to ensure that the reception of *the word of God* is constantly renewed: the faithful must be able better to penetrate Scripture, to become familiar with it and make its message their own through *lectio divina*. Along these lines, initiatives taken at different levels to go beyond a too fragmentary or superficial reading of the Bible are to be encouraged. They enable the baptized to enter, in a reflective way, into the Tradition of the Church which gives us the Word and enables us to know the figure of Christ.

In your teaching ministry, see that the *Person of Christ* is made known in the full richness of his mystery: the Son consubstantial with the Father who became man to save humanity and reconcile it to God (cf. 2 Cor 5:20) and to gather it together (cf. Jn 11:52). As in other eras, the figure of Christ is the object of reductive presentations, influenced by opinions or tendencies that take into account only part of the authentic Revelation received and transmitted by the Church. Sometimes the divinity of the Incarnate Word is misunderstood, which goes hand in hand with man’s withdrawal into himself; in other cases, the reality of the Incarnation itself, of the entry of God’s Son into the historical human condition, is underrated, thus creating an imbalance in Christology and even in the meaning of Redemption.

This brief outline leads me to stress the importance of catechesis, as I did in the Apostolic Letter *Tertio millennio adveniente* (n. 42). I would like once again to encourage all who with generous willingness are involved in planning and directing catechesis for children, young people and adults. Speaking more generally, it is indispensable for you to promote the pastoral care of the intellect, of learning enlightened by the faith. Your reports give an account of many institutions providing formation, such as the cathedral school in Paris and the different diocesan centres active in the same areas. The approach of the Great Jubilee must intensify these efforts so that more of the baptized will be ready to witness to the riches of the Christian mystery. It is in this spirit, moreover, that participants in the World Youth Day are invited to follow a catechesis entrusted to Bishops from the five continents. This will give them a taste for pursuing their research in their Dioceses, in order to acquire a spiritual formation on a par with the questions raised by their scientific and technical knowledge (cf. Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et spes*, nn. 11-16).

5. The Gospel would not have the full strength of its lived experience were the Church not enlivened by *the Holy Spirit*. This is why he is at the centre of the themes proposed for the second year of preparation for the Year 2000. The Spirit of truth, who comes from the Father, bears witness to Christ; and the Fourth Gospel immediately adds: "And you also are witnesses" (cf. Jn 15:26-27). It is up to the young, as it is to all the faithful, to take responsibility for *the universal mission* entrusted by Christ to his disciples: an arduous mission from the human standpoint, but a mission which is possible thanks to the gifts of the Spirit spread throughout the ecclesial body as a whole. You like to recall that when young people request the sacrament of *Confirmation*, they show real commitment to the faith and to the Church's mission. May they receive from their pastors and communities the necessary support to make the gifts they have received bear fruit and to persevere in their resolution! The World Day, as well as the preparation for the Jubilee, will be true milestones on the journey of the young people whose turn it is to take over the Church's mission.

6. The Jubilee will be a privileged time of *conversion*. We will have to make our Christian brothers and sisters and all our contemporaries more clearly understand that the Christian message is the Good News of liberation from sin and evil and, at the same time, a forceful call to return to choosing what is good. We must give thanks for the *merciful love of the Father*, who is always ready to forgive. It seems that in the minds of many, the need for repentance is often misunderstood because it is somehow isolated from the twofold, inseparable and positive law of love for God and neighbour, or because too much reliance is placed on human effort to progress, and because people are not always prepared to recognize the full significance of their own responsibility for what they have done. True conversion is God's free gift, received with joy and thanksgiving, and with the resolution to bring our life into conformity with our status as children of God gained for us by the Redeemer. If the Christian meaning of repentance were better understood, the sacrament of Reconciliation would not be suffering the unpopularity we have noticed and our contemporaries would be strengthened in hope.

The rediscovery of God's gracious love in the most intimate depths of our conscience will recover its full meaning if the Jubilee is also a time of *love for the poor* and the most destitute, and of a thoroughgoing renewal of social relations. The traditional meaning of the Jubilee Year involves a complete renewal of relations between people at all levels of society; it will be essential to make everyone realize that this stage in our history is a privileged opportunity for reconciliation and turns us towards a future of greater harmony. The common memory must be clarified and purified; in other words, by plainly acknowledging one another's weaknesses and faults, and freed from the old seeds of division or even bitterness, we will be better able to respond to the challenges of our time. For in our world today, so much must be done to foster peace, to promote the sharing of the goods of Creation, to guarantee respect for life and the dignity of the person! These challenges must be clearly presented at the approach of the new millennium.

7. Pastors and faithful, motivated by love for humanity, must recognize *the expectations of the*

contemporary world, with its doubts and sufferings. The Good News cannot be proclaimed unless the deep needs of people are grasped, so as to counteract the breakdown that is scarring society. In a word, to a civilization in crisis, which secularization is cutting off from its spiritual roots, we must respond by building the civilization of love (cf. *Tertio millennio adveniente*, n. 52). It is our special task to present this goal to the young people who are taking their place in the Church and in society; strengthened in hope, they will be ready to walk with Christ beside contemporary man, helping him to recognize his presence by their witness.

These essential intentions imply that *dialogue* remains open with the various points of view current in society. In sincere exchanges, over and above polemics, it will be possible to discern the signs of hope in our age. And for all these exchanges to bear fruit, it is appropriate to prepare Christians to conduct them in an enlightened way, both firm in their faith and animated with great warmth towards those who do not share it or oppose it. They will be able to offer the necessary explanations to those reductive presentations of Christianity which are so frequently observed. They will always be ready to express in a positive way the Christian meaning of man in creation, the message of hope and the moral requirements which stem from the faith; and they will imbue the temporal order with the Gospel spirit (cf. Second Vatican Council, *Apostolicam actuositatem*, n. 5). Pastors and lay people must continue their efforts to go to the heart of problems through dialogue with individuals, and also with opinion influenced by the media. On these lines, the Letter of the Bishops to the Catholics of France, *Proposer la foi dans la société actuelle*, will be a particularly useful guide.

8. As I said last year to the Committee responsible for preparing the Great Jubilee: “The apostolic renewal that the Church wishes to achieve in view of the Jubilee also comes through the authentic rediscovery of the Second Vatican Council” (4 June 1996, n. 5; *L’Osservatore Romano* English edition, 19 June 1996, p. 3), in fidelity and openness, in an attitude of constant listening and discernment regarding the signs of the times. For the Council “made a significant contribution to the preparation of that new springtime of Christian life which will be revealed by the Great Jubilee” (*Tertio millennio adveniente*, n. 18). It has given us the example of a humble and perceptive attitude. It has also shown the greatness of the heritage we have received, and which the Church transmits to us, especially through the example of so many saints and martyrs who have marked our history down to the age in which we are living.

We live in the era of *fraternal ecumenical dialogue* with Christians who aspire to full unity. The desire to make new and decisive steps on the path of unity is rightly growing stronger; to involve all the faithful in the ecumenical movement will be a beautiful fruit of the Jubilee. Inspire and develop what is already being done in your Dioceses in this regard. Dialogue with the other Churches and Ecclesial Communities cannot come to true fruition unless the faithful in the Dioceses, parishes and movements share in its spirit.

The Council also opened the way to *interreligious dialogue* with believers of other spiritual

traditions: in mutual respect and in the recognition of what truth and goodness each one possesses, without hasty confusion and in a demanding search for the truth, confident interpersonal relations will make it possible to progress towards the harmony of the human family willed by God.

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate, on the threshold of the third millennium lead the People of God on their earthly pilgrimage in the footsteps of Christ who brings us to the Father through his Spirit. Let us especially honour the sacrament of the Eucharist, the authentic memorial of the redemptive sacrifice and the real presence of Christ in the Church until the end of time.

May your ministry as stewards of God's mysteries bring the members of your Dioceses to celebrate the Jubilee as a great hymn of praise to the Holy Trinity who calls the world to let itself be seized by his love! May Mary, who is for everyone the model of lived faith, of listening to the Spirit in hope, and of perfect love for God and neighbour, accompany the Church on her way. "Her motherhood, which began in Nazareth and was lived most intensely in Jerusalem at the foot of the Cross, will be felt during this year as a loving and urgent invitation addressed to all the children of God, so that they will return to the house of the Father when they hear her maternal voice: 'Do whatever Christ tells you' (cf. Jn 2:5)" (*Tertio millennio adveniente*, n. 54).

As we await our great meeting in Paris for World Youth Day in the month of August, I entrust your ministry and your communities to the Lord, to Our Lady and to the patron saints of your Dioceses. With all my heart, I impart my Apostolic Blessing to you and to all the members of your Dioceses.

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