



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS
AND APOSTOLIC ADMINISTRATORS
OF CENTRAL ASIA
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Friday, 9 February 2001

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate and the Priesthood!

1. I am pleased to welcome all of you on your *ad limina* visit. I have looked forward eagerly to this fraternal meeting, which expresses the full communion of your Churches with Peter's Successor. In such an intense moment of spiritual unity, the Lord lets us feel his presence, encouraging us to confirm our personal willingness to guide the people his providential love has entrusted to our pastoral care.

We are meeting one month after the close of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 and the echo of that extraordinary time of grace, in which we returned to the sources of our salvation, still resounds within us. Now we continue the journey, keeping our gaze fixed on Christ, "the same yesterday and today and forever" (cf. Heb 13: 8).

I thank Bishop Jan Pawe³ Lenga for the words he addressed to me on behalf of you all. I greet each of you with great affection. Your witness to the Gospel and your zealous care for Christ's sheep in the difficult situations where you live and work honour you and are a great comfort to me.

After the long period of persecution and dispersion, which has caused many sufferings and privations, and at times even martyrdom, a season of hope has now opened for your small but promising communities. Your hard work is well known to me and I encourage you to persevere in

the efforts already begun: always look to Christ, our sure hope, and serve him with a fervent heart.

While expressing these sentiments to you, venerable Brothers, I would like to offer the people entrusted to you my best wishes for ever more generous fidelity to the Gospel. I am thinking of the clergy, consecrated persons, the laity, young people, families and especially those afflicted in body or spirit.

2. God has appointed you as Pastors to lead your people with wise humility and to be examples to whom they can look with trust (cf. 1 Pt 5: 2-3). Through your ministry, in communion with the Pope, you prolong the work of Christ, the Good Shepherd, who pastures his sheep and cares for them with tireless concern. With his grace he sanctifies those who receive him and nourishes the Church with the gift of the sacraments.

Be zealous, dear Brothers, in carrying out your mission. Emulate one another in reciprocal love; maintain a sincere and cordial dialogue with each other and help one another, while respecting each other's responsibilities. May the love that reigns among you be an example to the priests who assist you and to the faithful who look to you as burning lamps lighting the way.

May you be open to every person of good will. By your words and actions encourage everyone to cooperate generously in building the Church in harmony, diligence and peace. Faced with the vastness and complexity of the harvest and the scarcity of labourers, do not lose heart. Trust in Christ, who knows how to bring all things to fulfilment. In his name lead your communities, without fearing hardships or obstacles.

3. On meeting you personally, I was able better to understand your goals and the problems that worry you. I am fraternally close to you and, above all, I support you with prayer. A long road awaits you, but I am sure that you will not lack the enthusiasm to move forward quickly, overcoming the obstacles with the contribution of all.

I am thinking, for example, of a right relationship with the administrative authorities so that your ministry can be carried out within a legal framework that respects the State's laws and your legitimate freedom. I am also thinking of the necessary understanding which must continue to grow between the diocesan clergy and religious. Support priests and religious with prayer and your fatherly concern, spurring them to rely, in prayer and in the fervent celebration of the Eucharist, on the energy that flows from the daily encounter with Christ, the Eternal High Priest consecrated to the Father's glory. May your pastoral care make the most of everyone's best talents, so that each one's gifts may serve the common good. Divine Providence, which never abandons those who trust in it, will also help you with further resources and new co-workers in the priestly ministry to assist you in your efforts and join you in caring for the whole People of God.

I entrust you to the intercession of Mary, Star of Evangelization and Queen of the Apostles. May she comfort and sustain you in your daily apostolic work. May you be encouraged and supported by the example and intercession of the patron saints and faithful witnesses to the faith, some of whom in your lands have sealed their fidelity to Christ and the Gospel with their blood.

With these sentiments and as a token of my affection, I cordially give you a special Apostolic Blessing, which I gladly extend to the whole flock entrusted to you.