



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS
OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Friday, 9 February 2001

Venerable Brothers!

1. With great joy I extend a cordial greeting to each of you and my most heartfelt welcome. This visit renews the close bonds of unity and communion that join you and the communities entrusted to you with the Successor of Peter.

I thank Archbishop Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz for the words he spoke to me on your behalf. In addressing you, I wish to express my sincere affection to your communities, assuring them of my constant good-will and a daily remembrance in my prayer.

This meeting is taking place a few weeks after the closing of the Holy Door, while we still have a vivid memory of the Great Jubilee, a time when divine mercy was poured out upon the Church and the world in abundance. The fruits of that extraordinary event are tangible and strongly encourage us to intensify our efforts for the kingdom of God.

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate, strengthened by the spirit of the Great Jubilee, you are resuming your journey amid the trials of the world and the consolations of God, while remaining faithful to the task of a careful evangelization and a constant fostering of the *sensus Ecclesiae*. In this extensive pastoral activity you receive valuable help from the collaboration of priests, consecrated persons and lay faithful, as well as from a promising group of young people who are preparing for the priestly ministry.

2. All the wounds left by 70 years of militant atheism are still painful, but they must not discourage

you from carrying out your ministry. The realization that Christ has called you to proclaim the Gospel at a difficult time must spur you to an even bolder work of catechizing those entrusted to you by Providence. I am aware of your current efforts to make the liturgical books, teachings of the Magisterium, catechetical texts and prayer books more accessible in your language. I wish to encourage you to continue in this direction, since a deeper and more generous fidelity to the life of grace is strengthened by a convinced and prayerful knowledge of the divine mysteries.

The vast mission of evangelization you are undertaking first of all requires that you take care to train priests who are holy and zealous in their ministry. In this connection, you are already working to prepare Russian-born teachers and professors who can deeply understand the mentality and heritage of their great people and, at the same time, can fully and genuinely appreciate the spirit of their own culture through knowledge of Sacred Scripture and the writings of the ancient Church Fathers.

It is also necessary to involve young people in the task of the new evangelization by identifying the different vocations that God gives those who have been marked with the seal of Baptism. It all depends, of course, on trusting prayer to the Lord of the harvest that he will send into his harvest workers after his own heart who are holy and generous.

3. A vocation comes from God but grows in a family and is supported by a fervent, faithful Christian community. Who does not realize the spiritual and moral devastation inherited from the century just ended? Who is unfamiliar with the difficulties that families, especially young ones, must face today? Know how to be a strong and encouraging support for them. Accompany them as reliable guides; help them with your prayer, open the treasures of divine mercy to them and break the bread of Christ's truth for them. This is the vast apostolic work that you, diocesan Pastors, are called to carry out with those whom the Lord has put at your side: priests, consecrated persons and lay collaborators. Nurture a spirit of heartfelt understanding and mutual support among yourselves, while respecting the charism of each individual and coordinating the various methods of evangelization.

Although the difficulties of daily life are inevitable, you can overcome them with the Lord's help by following the high road of the dialogue of charity. This is how individual gifts serve the good of the entire Body of Christ.

4. Respectful dialogue also becomes a patient methodology, making it possible to establish relations with other baptized faithful living in Russia. Seek whatever fosters mutual understanding and, when possible, cooperation: this is a concrete rule of ecumenical dialogue that was so dear to Bl. John XXIII, who loved to say again and again that what unites us is much greater than what divides us. This is why we should not be discouraged by the difficulties and even the failures of the ecumenical journey, but, sustained by prayer, we must continue making every effort to establish full unity among Christ's disciples. With trust in God, with charity, with constancy we can help to

hasten the fulfilment of the divine Master's ardent desire "that they may all be one ... so that the world may believe" (Jn 17: 21).

Venerable Brothers, the Bishop of Rome is close to you and with great affection encourages you to persevere in this important spiritual work entrusted to you by God. May your hallmark be charity, which is the bond of perfection. Enlivened by this fundamental virtue, you will know how to find, as you are already doing, ways to help the poor and needy who knock at the door of your heart. By imitating the Good Samaritan in the Gospel, you will serve Christ himself who comes to you in the ragged clothes, pleading faces and sore-laden bodies of the poor and abandoned. This is a direct and understandable work of evangelization.

As I entrust you to the protection of Mary, Mother of God, who is revered with tender affection in the land where you carry out your pastoral ministry, I invoke upon you an abundance of heavenly graces and bless you with all my heart.