



The Holy See

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

Friday, 16 February 2001

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate!

1. "May our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word" (2 *Thes* 2: 16-17). With these words of Paul to the Christians of Thessalonica, I cordially greet you, dear Bishops of the Church in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. You have come on your visit *ad limina Apostolorum* to show your Catholic communion and your bond with the Successor of Peter. I thank Metropolitan Archbishop Franc Perko of Belgrade, President of the Episcopal Conference, for the kind words he addressed to me on your behalf as well.

Through you, I express my appreciation to the priests, the consecrated persons and all who work with you in the task of evangelization. May the Lord reward you all abundantly, as he himself has promised.

In these days I have been able to converse fraternally with each of you, and I am grateful for the words of hope you expressed to me regarding the Churches that the Holy Spirit has appointed you to govern and, as successors of the Apostles, to safeguard their deposit of faith (cf. *Acts* 20: 28-31). Together with you I pray to the Father, from whom every good and perfect gift comes (cf. *Jas* 1: 17), that the believing people, whose Bishops you are, will make the most of every opportunity to bear witness to the Good News and produce abundant fruits of holiness.

2. Meeting with you gives me the chance to observe your great zeal and readiness to try to respond in a suitable way to today's pastoral needs. I urge you to continue with courage, in union

with your priests, to carry out your tasks of service to the People of God who live in your regions, without paying heed to the toil and sacrifices. I sincerely hope that the new political climate created in recent months will open new prospects and offer new opportunities so that the activities of your country's Catholic communities can be conducted in an orderly way.

In your service always look to the example of the Good Shepherd, Christ the Lord. When your efforts seem useless, listen to the Master, who also says to you: "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch". Make Peter's reply your own: "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets" (*Lk 5: 4-5*).

Remain attentive to the breath of the Holy Spirit and, together with your diocesan communities, let yourselves be guided by him. He never ceases to bestow abundant vitality and gifts on communities and on each of the faithful. You will not lack, then, apostolic courage, prophetic foresight and the necessary wisdom for being teachers of life and zealous Pastors for the flocks entrusted to you.

3. We are living in an historical time filled with lights and shadows. In crossing the threshold of the new millennium, a new stretch of the road to be traveled with missionary courage is appearing on the Church's horizons. Let us look at the future with confidence, because it too is enlightened by the Gospel, "the power of God ... to everyone who has faith" (*Rm 1: 16*). It is up to us, Christ's disciples, to spread this bright message to the men and women, to the families and to all humanity of the third millennium.

The various situations in your individual diocesan communities unfortunately do not make it possible, as one would wish, to plan common pastoral activities in every area. However, this does not prevent you from exchanging experiences and from helping each other on the basis of what you do have in common. By unifying your goals and not wasting the available resources and strengths of your diocesan communities, try to coordinate your efforts. This will enable you to give further impetus to the new evangelization by involving men and women of all ages, families and parishes.

All the People of God - priests, religious and lay faithful - must feel responsibly engaged, together with you, in the vast work of evangelization. By virtue of Baptism every believer is called to make his own contribution in the Church according to his state of life.

4. The proclamation of the Gospel will have a greater impact if, as is only right, it is accompanied by the witness of a consistent life that is faithful to Christ and by the search for pastoral ways and means that will give suitable responses to the challenges of our time. Pastoral activities, then, should aim at prompting fidelity to Christ and his Gospel. This pastoral commitment will bear abundant fruit if it insists on the centrality of the Word of God and the vital importance of the sacraments. This is the way to grow in faith, hope and love; it is the path of holiness which every

Christian must daily seek.

The urgent need for evangelization requires constant concern for the formation of candidates for the priesthood and the consecrated life. The ongoing theological, liturgical and pastoral formation of the clergy is also necessary. At the same time an intense vocations apostolate should be promoted, supported by constant prayer that involves and engages the entire Ecclesial Community.

The revival of the spiritual life in the country where you live and work can be helped by promoting sound popular devotion, missions to the people and all the traditional pastoral methods, as well as those that meet modern needs, including the communications media. In the light of the Word of God and the Church's Magisterium, make the most of your past experiences and the new opportunities for proclaiming salvation.

It is important, moreover, to remember that the Gospel must be inculturated in everyday life, so that whoever accepts it will commit himself to building a civilization of love and peace. This too will be a contribution to the development of culture itself and to its continual progress. For, "culture is the form of man's self-expression in his journey through history, on the level of both individuals and social groups.... A person necessarily lives within a specific culture" (*Message for the World Day of Peace 2001*, nn. 4-5).

I am aware of the tragic situations which your peoples experienced in the past. Now you have updated me on the difficult situation that continues even today, in particular, the persistence of political and social tensions that threaten to explode into new conflicts. Encourage your faithful not to surrender to the temptation of using violence.

5. Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate! Remain united with one another; form one heart and one soul with your communities, persevering in the teaching of the Apostles, in communion, in the breaking of bread and in prayer (cf. *Acts 2: 42; 4: 32*). Despite the difficulties, energetically commit yourselves to ecumenical dialogue, so that the journey to the full unity of Christ's disciples may continue. He himself is with us and offers us the Holy Spirit to lead us towards that unity for which he prayed to the Father (cf. *Jn 17: 20-21*) before entering "once for all into the Holy Place ... with his own blood, thus obtaining an eternal redemption" (*Heb 9: 12*).

The path to unity includes heartfelt forgiveness and sincere reconciliation. This paves the way to the necessary unity of Christ's disciples and prepares a future of peace and progress.

"That they may all be one ... so that the world may believe" (*Jn 17: 21*). The unity of Christians is a gift of God that requires our generous and unconditional commitment: "Christ's prayer reminds us that this gift needs to be received and developed ever more profoundly.... It is on Jesus' prayer and not on our own strength that we base the hope that even within history we shall be able to

reach full and visible communion with all Christians" (Apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte*, n. 48).

6. We are comforted by the certainty that God will make what each of you has sown (1 *Cor* 3: 5-6) grow in abundance beyond all human expectations.

I entrust you, your priests and deacons, together with the religious and lay faithful of your Churches, to the maternal protection of the Mother of the Redeemer. May Mary, the dawn of the new times, obtain for you the gift of fidelity to the mission you have received, the courage to continue zealously proclaiming the Gospel and the joy of bearing witness to Christ.

In assuring you of a constant remembrance in my prayer, I cordially bless you.