



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY
OF THE PONTIFICAL COMMISSION FOR LATIN AMERICA**

Friday, 23 March 2001

Your Eminences,

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

1. I am pleased to receive you this morning, councillors and members of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America who are holding your plenary assembly for the purpose of offering some pastoral guidelines for continuing the new evangelization of what we call the "Continent of Hope", precisely because of what it means for the Church. In fact, these lands which received Christ's light over five centuries ago and now represent about half the world's Catholics, are distinguished by a cultural identity that is deeply marked by the Gospel and can count on a Church which is vital and full of evangelizing energy.

I cordially thank your President, Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re, for his affectionate greeting to me on behalf of you all and for describing to me your work and the goals that motivate your efforts.

2. Starting from my recent Apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte*, you have examined the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in America* and have attempted to assess its application in these first two years since its publication during that unforgettable celebration at the Shrine of Guadalupe, Mexico.

You have reflected on the principal contents of the Exhortation, studying it in the light of current realities in order to examine problems and outline pastoral proposals for intensifying the *work of evangelization* in the beloved Latin American nations.

I would like to encourage and spur you in your pastoral work, because we are faced with many

challenges and need ecclesial insight and apostolic daring to deal with them adequately.

3. One of these is *to preserve, defend and increase the integrity of the faith*. Consequently, with my confirmation and ratification, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith last year published the Declaration *Dominus Iesus* on the unicity and salvific universality of Jesus Christ and the Church. In this Declaration, I invited all Christians "to renew their fidelity to him in the joy of faith and to bear unanimous witness that the Son, both today and tomorrow, is "the way, and the truth, and the life' (Jn 14: 6)" (*Angelus*, 1 October 2000).

In this regard, we need to pay special attention to the problem of the sects, which are "a grave hindrance to the work of evangelization" (*Ecclesia in America*, n. 73). They have been much studied and discussed, since they are a phenomenon that cannot be regarded with indifference.

Resolute pastoral action is essential for dealing with this serious problem, by reviewing the pastoral methods used, strengthening the structures of communion and mission, and making the most of "the evangelizing possibilities of a purified popular religiosity" (*Ecclesia in America*, n. 73). In this regard, you know how important is the presence of evangelizers, since wherever priests, religious or lay people are dedicated to the apostolate, sects do not thrive. Although faith is God's gift, it cannot be instilled or maintained without the help of evangelizers.

In the process of strengthening the faith, the Eucharist is the privileged place for meeting the living Jesus Christ. Sunday Mass must be a constant commitment and practice of all the faithful. Continually dedicate yourselves and, at the same time, pastorally commit your priests to the task of promoting this very important aspect of ecclesial life, which I already recommended in my Apostolic Letter *Dies Domini* (cf. Chapter II). Therefore it is necessary, as I recently recalled, "to stress particularly the Sunday Eucharist and Sunday itself experienced as a special day of faith, the day of the risen Lord and of the gift of the Spirit, the true weekly Easter" (Apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte*, n. 35).

4. Another challenge of capital importance is the *promotion and care of vocations*. Latin America needs far more priests. I am pleased to see that new seminaries are being started in many Dioceses, including minor seminaries. It is also a good idea to organize formation courses for seminary educators, who must be exemplary priests in perfect harmony with the Church's Magisterium, so that their work in seminaries may be effective and promising.

I urge the Bishops to be *assiduously and constantly available* to their seminarians and especially to their priests, in order to guide, motivate and encourage them to work generously.

5. Among the many topics which, like the latter, I extensively treated in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in America* and to which we now need to return here, I would particularly like to mention the *evangelization of young people*. On them are based the hopes and expectations of

a future of greater communion and solidarity for the Church and the societies of America (cf. *Ecclesia in America*, n. 47).

The last World Youth Day, celebrated in August of the Jubilee Year, underscored how young people are a powerful force for the evangelization of the world today. They must be evangelized in depth, starting from their resources of generosity, openness and intuition.

I hope that the next World Youth Day, which will be celebrated in America, more precisely in Toronto, Canada, will be a new and decisive step for the evangelization of young people on this beloved continent.

6. You began this assembly of the Pontifical Commission, whose "primary task is to study in a unified way the doctrinal and pastoral questions which concern the life and development of the Church in Latin America" (*Motu Proprio Decessores nostri*, I), by presenting the image of *Jesus Christ the Evangelizer*, thereby emphasizing the centrality of the Saviour in the Church and in her evangelizing work. For, "everything planned in the Church must have Christ and his Gospel as its starting-point" (*Ecclesia in America*, n. 67). I developed this fundamental idea more amply in the Apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte*, in which "I indicated the guidelines for the Church's life and her evangelizing mission in the third millennium" (*Homily*, 4 February 2001, n. 1).

7. The Jubilee which has just closed has left us the legacy of a pressing invitation to meet the future by setting out anew from Christ, keeping the Lord at the centre of our peoples' personal and social life.

The habit of generous renewal and of consistency with one's faith, which emerged during the Jubilee year, is a call to "put out into the deep", with determination, on to the vast ocean of the new millennium, while relying on divine help.

"*Duc in altum*" (Lk 5: 4), Christ said to the Apostle Peter on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. *Duc in altum*, the Pope repeats to you, fishers of men, at the end of your plenary meeting. *Open wide the doors of America to Christ and his Gospel!*

Your nations need, today as in the past, great evangelizers with the spirit and talent of St Turibius of Mogrovejo, whose feast we celebrate today. He, whom I proclaimed patron of all the Bishops of Latin America in 1983, is a genuine example of a Pastor whom we can and must imitate in the task of the new evangelization, which I once again entrust to the protection and guidance of *Our Lady of Guadalupe*, "the sure path to our meeting with Christ" (*Ecclesia in America*, n. 11).

In the name of Christ, our life and our hope, I bless you all.

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