



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS OF BRAZIL'S SOUTHERN REGION II
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Saturday, 31 August 2002

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,

1. I welcome you with great joy, Bishops of Brazil's Southern Region II, while you are gathered together in Rome for your *ad limina Apostolorum* visit. This visit is meant to express the bond of communion that unites each one of you and your local communities with the Successor of Peter, called to confirm his brothers and sisters in the faith (cf. Lk 22,32). I greet you with fraternal affection in the Apostle's words: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you (cf. Rm 1,7). Through you, I address the same greeting to the priests, religious and lay faithful of the particular Churches of Paraná which you preside over in charity.

2. I thank Archbishop Lúcio Ignácio Baumgaertner of Cascavel for his kind words on behalf of your region, because they express the sentiments of fraternal union of all the Bishops with the Successor of Peter and with the Church gathered from the four cardinal points, which is united with this Apostolic See. Is this not the main idea of one of the conclusions that last year's Synod of Bishops wished to manifest?

"Only if a deep and convinced *unity of the pastors with the Successor of Peter* is clearly discernible", as I said on the occasion of the solemn Eucharistic concelebration closing the Synod, "and also the unity of the *bishops with their priests*, can we give a credible reply to the challenges that come from the present social and cultural world" (*Homily, Mass for the closing of the Synod*, 27 October 2001, n. 4; *ORE*, 31 October 2001, p. 2).

The Church in Paraná is certainly considering the prospects proposed by the General Directives for the Evangelizing Action of Brazil, as a result of *Tertio millennio adveniente*. In reading your

quinquennial reports, I could observe evident progress in the organization of your dioceses and in the wide range of pastoral activities which every local Ordinary, with those involved in pastoral life, is handling with courage and determination to face what the new evangelization requires. I would certainly like to state that the premise will always be the *ecclesiology of communion* which the last Synod so much insisted on. At the beginning of the millennium, the universal Church wants to set out anew, in union with the Successor of Peter and with a united episcopate.

3. On various occasions during my Pontificate, I wished to mention the two great pillars supporting the condition of communion: "Communion requires that the deposit of faith be preserved in its purity and integrity", and "the unity of the College of Bishops under the authority of the Successor of Peter" (cf. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in America*, n. 33), since the full exercise of the primacy of Peter is fundamental for the identity and vitality of the Church.

Furthermore, it is the specific task of the National Bishops' Conference of Brazil to show concern for the Church and her universal mission by means of communion and collaboration with the Apostolic See and by means of missionary activity, especially *ad gentes*. Thus every Bishop should encourage those who evangelize in his own diocese, and above all himself, to great fidelity to Catholic doctrine. He should also pay constant attention to ensuring the full conformity of the explanation of the Word to the Revelation entrusted by the divine Teacher to the Magisterium of the Church. Moreover, this identity supposes a clear disciplinary and doctrinal harmony with the bishops of the world, in order to maintain, with the world episcopate, the essential bond with the Pope.

Under the heading of the pastoral plans that in coming years will be drawn up as a result of our fraternal meeting and, considering the Plan of Evangelization of the Church in Brazil on the theme "Be Church in the New Millennium", approved by the Brazilian Bishops' Conference in 2000, I hope it will be possible to pursue this "common path of the whole Church" which is shared by the Brazilian episcopate.

4. "At the dawn of the third millennium the Church continues to rely on the ideal figure of the bishop, that of the Pastor who, configured to Christ in holiness of life, expends himself generously for the Church entrusted to him, at the same time carrying in his heart solicitude for the Churches spread over the face of the earth (cf. II Cor 11,28)". (*Homily, Mass for the closing of the Synod*, 27 October 2001, n. 3; *ORE*, 31 October 2001, p. 2).

From this affirmation the foundation and the hope comes that, by breaking down the barriers of a formula restricted to a single diocese or country, the Synod wanted to propose again to all the Bishops, Successors of the Apostles. *Duc in altum*, put out into the deep! Throw yourselves into courageous initiatives, dare to strive for great goals, certain that God does not lose battles! Indeed, aspire to the greater charisms. What greater charism is there than that of personal holiness?

Here we return to the image of the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep (cf. Jn 10,15). The Good Shepherd is not only one who guides his sheep effectively and methodically, even if these elements are necessary in every human work and especially in the guidance of souls.

Above all, he must be *good*. Every pastoral programme, catechesis at every level and the overall pastoral *care of the souls* of the faithful, that draw their holiness from the Supreme Pastor, Jesus, must find in the life and witness of the bishop and the clergy the immediate incentive and model. Otherwise, all the work will be in vain. Only God is good (cf. Mk 10,18), says Our Lord; but for Him, with Him and in Him, we participate in the grace that is given to us, to make it fruitful, not as our own possession but as a gift to be dispensed. All goodness and every good gift come from the Most High, Giver of all good things (cf. Jas 1,17).

The Bishop of Hippo rightly noted how insistently the Lord asked Peter: *Do you love me? Feed my sheep*, for it is a serious warning for all who are responsible for guiding a flock. What he means is, "If you love me, in feeding the flock do not think of yourself but of my sheep; guide them as mine, not as yours! Seek in them my glory not yours, my property and not yours, my interests and not yours! Do not be like those who, in time of danger, think only of themselves and of all that derives from this principle which is the root of all evil. Those who feed the sheep of Christ should not love themselves! Do not feed them as your own, but as Christ's!" (*Treatise on the Gospel of St John*, 123, 5; CCL 36, 678-680). Hence the great responsibility of knowing how to administer the goods that will be entrusted to you.

Every five years the Bishops come to Rome, not just for routine administration, that is, to present a report on the state of their diocese. After all, they need to confront the condition of their souls, and, what is called for, their own personal holiness and that of their flock. No Bishop can avoid the divine requirement "*redde rationem villicationis tuae*" (give an account of your stewardship): give an account of your ministry and of the souls entrusted to you (cf. Lk 16,2). Thus you must entrust your fidelity to your obligations, your resolutions and the experiences you have had at the Apostolic See to the Divine Consoler, so that in the future they may fortify the soul of the entire diocese bringing it ever closer to our heavenly home.

5. With these premises, I say to you once again: *Duc in altum!* The love of God exhorts us! "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Mt 5,16).

In the course of the years, I have often repeated my summons to the new evangelization. I do so again now, especially, in order to insist that we must rekindle apostolic zeal in all the sectors of society in Paraná and throughout Brazil, urging individuals and communities to a daily effort to be involved in the mission. As I have already had the opportunity to say, you should reach out "to adults, families, young people, children, without ever hiding the most radical demands of the

Gospel message" (*Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 40).

I know well this Region's strength in the *service* offered to all men and women, and especially to the poor and marginalized, its involvement in the dialogue with non-Catholic Christians, with the members of the different religions and cultures, and in the true proclamation which you must address to Catholics who are far off by witnessing to the ecclesial communion which those who share in the Church's life must live.

In your various plans for pastoral activity, I have observed the emphasis you give to young people, the family, catechesis, vocations and the media. I hope you will also continue your concern to offer adequate direction to the pastoral care of children.

Still, in the framework of the Southern Region II, you Bishops of Paraná have distinguished yourselves in the preparation and implementation of plans, in their good organization, dynamism, balance and collegial affection, expressed in the meetings, in group work, in your diocesan commemorations and in particular, in the promotion of vocations and seminaries. The Paraná region has numerous clergy and even contributes to sending new priests to regions located beyond the provincial boundaries, and for service to and exchange of priests within Japanese-Brazilian communities.

Along these lines, you must also continue in your commitment to *catechesis* at all levels, particularly, in your practical approach to the sacraments. I know that in certain dioceses the faithful prefer to practise forms of popular piety (processions, novenas, etc.) and have a certain difficulty when it comes to participating actively in the liturgy. Therefore, I renew my appeal to use every means to ensure that people can receive the sacraments, particularly Penance and the Eucharist, certainly with the necessary spiritual preparation. The presence of numerous and dynamic apostolic movements "that work in full harmony within both the universal Church and the particular Churches, and in obedience to the authoritative directives of the Pastors" (*Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 46), is a great help for diocesan pastoral care. In many cases their action can be decisive for the permanent process of conversion, which belongs to evangelization and can thus foster a society that is more just and reconciled with God. Therefore, the apostolate of the laity is acquiring crucial importance in bringing a great many men and women closer to God, for it is in the family environment, in the world of work, in the home and in society in general that the role of the lay person becomes indispensable, and, often, irreplaceable.

It is also necessary to consider the phenomenon of *immigration*, which has been familiar to you for a few generations. Today it has taken on a growing momentum in the border regions, where Latin American peoples come to seek in your country a better living standard. I thank God for your constant concern to keep up regular contact with the Bishops' Conferences of the neighbouring countries in order gradually to coordinate your pastoral activities, and to welcome with generosity and dignity those in need. I also entrust to the activity of Pastors and priests the mission of being

vigilant to *the overall negative influence of the sects*, on either side of your frontier. The kind and hospitable character of your people must not be drawn by a conformist and utilitarian tendency to fall back on short-term solutions. One can never say too often that "pastoral policies will have to be revised, so that each particular Church can offer the faithful more personalized religious care, strengthen the structures of communion and mission, make the most of the evangelizing possibilities of a purified popular religiosity, and thus give new life to the faith of all Catholics in Jesus Christ" (*Ecclesia in America*, n. 73).

Notable for the spirit of communion that must direct the pastoral life of every diocese, are many religious congregations who, especially in the field of *education*, make a fundamental contribution to the formation of youth and to the promotion of vocations.

I know well the dedication of religious in this area, and especially in the mission *ad gentes*. Without doubt Brazil will be able to be the source of generous missionary vocations for Africa and Asia. If, at times, the Lord permits those lands to be bathed in their blood, may the whole Church know that martyrdom, a special form of communion with Christ the Redeemer, is a source of extraordinary graces for the People of God.

6. Dear Brothers, these are the brief reflections which I share with you today, seeking to offer you encouragement in the Lord, and to motivate you in your ministry for his People.

All that you have done in these years is precious in the eyes of God. However, this meeting is a providential opportunity to offer an incentive to your pastoral commitment. I fervently pray for your success in this important pastoral task, so that the Church in Paraná will shine in her full glory as the Bride of Christ who chose her with infinite love. As I entrust your apostolic mission to the intercession of the Virgin Mary who in every age is the bright Star of Evangelization, to you and to all the priests, religious, and lay faithful of your dioceses, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.