



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE BISHOPS OF THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCES
OF LITHUANIA, ESTONIA AND LATVIA
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Friday, 23 June 2006

*Your Eminences,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,*

Thank you for your pleasant visit. You have come from the peaceful lands of the Baltic *ad limina Apostolorum*, to strengthen your communion with the Successor of Peter and to bring him the cordial greeting of those entrusted to your pastoral care. I extend my grateful thoughts to each one of you, addressed first of all to Cardinal Jānis Pujats, Archbishop of Riga, and to Archbishop Sigitas Tamkevičius, Metropolitan Archbishop of Kaunas.

They have expressed sentiments of convinced attachment to the ministry of the Bishop of Rome on your behalf and on behalf of your diocesan Communities, to which I assure my remembrance in prayer. In the past few days I have listened to and shared with attention what each one of you personally wished to point out to me concerning the functioning of his own Diocese, the generous commitment of the priests, the hope of the lay people and the direction in which civil society is moving.

As I thank you for your spontaneous trust, in a spirit of collegial co-responsibility for the People of God, I encourage you to discern the seeds of good that God has sown in your Communities in order to carry out an increasingly convinced, courageous and tireless missionary action.

Among the many topics I would like to discuss with you, I will reflect today on one of great importance even in your countries: the family. Side by side with exemplary families, there are often others that are unfortunately marked by the frailty of conjugal bonds, the scourge of abortion and the demographic crisis, little attention to teaching authentic values to the children, the

precariousness of employment, social mobility that weakens relations between the generations and a growing sense of inner bewilderment among the young people.

A modernity that is not rooted in authentic human values is destined to be dominated by the tyranny of instability and confusion. For this reason, every Ecclesial Community, rich in its faith and supported by God's grace, is called to be a reference point and to enter into dialogue with the Community of which it is an integral part.

The Church, teacher of life, draws from natural law and the Word of God those principles which indicate the indispensable foundations on which to build the family according to the Creator's plan. Dear and venerable Brothers, never tire of always being courageous defenders of life and of the family; persevere in the efforts you have undertaken for the human and religious formation of engaged couples and young families. This is a highly deserving task which I hope will also be appreciated and supported by the institutions of civil society.

The duty of guiding the People of God, of protecting it, defending it and training it in truth and love, is entrusted to you as Pastors. Christ, the Supreme High Priest, is its true Head and, as the Second Vatican Council teaches, he is present among believers in the person of the Bishops, assisted by the priests (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 21).

"Just as... St Peter and the rest of the Apostles constitute a unique apostolic college, so in like fashion the Roman Pontiff, Peter's Successor, and the Bishops, the successors of the Apostles, are related with and united to one another" (*ibid.*, n. 22). The Bishops placed in charge of the particular Churches "exercise their pastoral office over the portion of the People of God assigned to them, not over other Churches nor the Church universal" (*ibid.*, n. 23).

It is important, therefore, that an affective and effective collegiality between the Successor of Peter and all the Pastors be reinforced with full respect for the ministry of each one. Thus, as a well-structured, harmonious body, the People of God can grow in holiness and in missionary vitality, thanks to the contribution of each one of its members.

Venerable Brothers, tirelessly foster communion among yourselves and within each one of your Dioceses, making the most of the contribution of all. Love the priests, your first collaborators who are co-responsible for pastoral care, and give them spiritual and if necessary also material support.

The better able they are to have at their disposal the indispensable guarantees for a dignified living standard, the more serenely they will be able to dedicate themselves to the pastoral ministry entrusted to them. See to their constant formation, also with renewal courses that help them to deepen their knowledge of the teachings of the Second Vatican Council and to appreciate the rich content of the liturgical texts and documents of the Church translated into your respective

languages.

Nurture missionary zeal in them so that they will proclaim and witness with joy and enthusiasm to the Good News. May every priest be like the "apple of the Bishop's eye", always followed with fatherly affection and esteem. If priests are enlivened by trust and an authentic Gospel spirit, they will be able to accompany effectively the promising reawakening of lay people, already active in your ecclesiastical district area.

Venerable Brothers, I know that you appropriately combine with concern for your priests another important preoccupation: vocations and the formation of seminarians and aspirants to the consecrated life. The secularized mindset that has also burst into your Communities is increasingly discouraging young men from responding positively to Christ's invitation to follow him more closely, and for this reason you should promote an attentive youth and vocations ministry. Do not hesitate to propose explicitly to youth the Gospel ideal, the beauty of the *sequela Christi sine glossa* without compromises; help all who set out on the path of the priesthood and the consecrated life to respond generously to the Lord Jesus, who never ceases to look lovingly upon his Church and upon humanity.

As for seminarians, ensure that they have formation teachers endowed with a solid humanity and deep piety and who are open to dialogue and collaboration, teachers faithful to the teaching of the Magisterium and credible Gospel witnesses.

Venerable Brothers, the Lord has chosen you to work in his vineyard in a society that only recently emerged from the sad winter of persecution. While the wounds that Communism inflicted on your peoples have not yet completely healed, the influence of a secularism that exalts the mirages of consumerism and makes man the measure of himself is growing. All this makes your pastoral action even more difficult, but without losing confidence, persevere tirelessly in proclaiming the Gospel of Christ, the word of salvation for the people of every epoch and every culture.

The Gospel does not humiliate human freedom and authentic social progress; on the contrary, it helps human beings to fulfil themselves completely and renews society through the gentle and exacting law of love.

May the powerful intercession of Mary, our heavenly Mother, sustain you in your mission and may the example of the martyrs who remained faithful to Christ during the terrible persecutions of past times be an encouragement to you. I assure you of my fraternal and prayerful closeness, as I warmly bless you, the priests, the men and women religious and all the lay faithful entrusted to your pastoral care.

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