



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE BISHOPS OF COSTA RICA
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Friday, 8 February 2008

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate

It fills me with joy to receive you at the conclusion of your *ad limina* visit, which gives me the opportunity to greet you all together and to encourage you in hope, so necessary for the ministry entrusted to you and which you generously exercise. I am grateful for the words of Bishop José Francisco Ulloa Rojas of Cartago, President of your Bishops' Conference, expressing the challenges and hopes you encounter in your pastoral duties as well as your closeness and strict communion with the Bishop of Rome, the See "*in which the primacy of the Apostolic See ever resides*" (St Augustine, *Ep.* 43, 3, 7).

For some of you, recently appointed to the Episcopal College, this may represent a new encounter, while for others the particular Churches they carry in their hearts are new and the face of the Successor of Peter is new to you all as well. This newness can also contribute to endowing with greater intensity the purpose of this visit that includes the renewal before the tombs of Sts Peter and Paul of your faith in Jesus Christ, passed down by the Apostles and which, as their successors, it is your duty to preserve. At the same time, our meeting must help revive your "solicitude for all the Church" (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 23), and thereby also contribute to expanding the hearts of all believers with the perspective of universality proper to the Christian message.

You have before you the task of seeking new ways of proclaiming Christ in the midst of a situation of rapid and often profound transformation, highlighting the missionary character of all pastoral activity. In this regard, the recent Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops' Conferences, celebrated in Aparecida, stressed that welcoming and making their own the Gospel message is something for which every person and each generation are responsible in the different circumstances and stages of their lives.

The Costa Rican People also constantly need to revitalize their ancient and deep Christian roots, their vigorous popular piety and beloved Marian devotion, so that they produce the fruits of a life worthy of disciples of Jesus, nourished by prayer and the sacraments, by consistency in daily life, by faith professed and by commitment to take an active part in the mission to "open... the world and allow God to enter, and so open it to truth, to love and to what is good" (cf. *Spe Salvi*, n. 35).

The Lord has been generous with his vineyard in Costa Rica, where a large number of priests are the Bishops' most important collaborators in his pastoral ministry. For this reason they require further guidelines and clear criteria, on-going formation and support in the exercise of their ministry and the closeness that befits "sons and friends" (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 28), which touches their hearts while it intensifies their efforts, helps them in their difficulties and, if necessary, corrects and remedies possible situations that might tarnish the image of the priest and of the Church herself.

This great patrimony of every particular Church is preserved and complemented by painstaking attention to seminarians, whose suitability demands rigorous discernment. Moreover, an abstract and formal formation is not adequate to prepare them to live in the first person the Apostle's words: "that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ" (I Jn 1: 3). In addition, it is a perspective that can inspire in young people enthusiasm for Jesus and his saving mission, giving birth to a heartfelt desire to take part in it as priests and consecrated people.

Dear Bishops, you know well the risks of a life of listless and superficial faith when it meets decoys such as the proselytism of the sects or of pseudo-religious groups, the multitude of promises of easy and instant well-being that end in disillusion and disappointment or the spread of ideologies which, while they claim to exalt the human person, in reality trivialize him. In such a situation the announcement: "Man's great, true hope which holds firm in spite of all disappointments can only be God - God who has loved us and who continues to love us" (cf. *Spe Salvi*, n. 27) acquires incalculable value.

By their vocation men and women religious and consecrated persons are called first and foremost to be a sign of "the mystery of the Kingdom of God already at work in history" (*Vita Consecrata*, n. 1). They are thus especially responsible for bearing a lively witness to this hope which uplifts the soul and is a source of strength in the vicissitudes of human life. For this reason they are a precious gift to the Church "as a decisive element for her mission, since it "manifests the inner nature of the Christian calling" (*ibid.*, n. 3), and so we must thank the Lord for their presence in every particular Church.

The lay faithful are also responsible for taking part in this mission in accordance with their specific vocation. It is, moreover, beautiful to observe their effective collaboration in preserving and spreading faith's call through catechesis and cooperation with the parishes and the various

pastoral organizations of the diocese. Lay people certainly deserve the gratitude, encouragement and constant attention of their Pastors in order that they constantly and systematically receive a sound Christian formation, also taking into account that it is they who are called to bring Christian values to the diverse sectors of society and to the world of work and of civil or political coexistence. In fact, the temporal order is one of their obligatory concerns (cf. *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, n. 7), and "the mission of the lay faithful is therefore to configure social life correctly, respecting its legitimate autonomy and cooperating with other citizens according to their respective competences and fulfilling their own responsibility" (*Deus Caritas Est*, n. 29).

With regard to community catechists and animators, it is right in particular to remember the need to accompany the transmission of correct doctrine with personal witness, the firm commitment to live in accordance with the Lord's commands, and with a vigorous experience of being faithful and active members of the Church. Indeed, this example of life is vital if the instruction is not to remain no more than a mere transmission of theoretical knowledge about God's mysteries, but rather to lead to adopting a Christian way of life. It was already crucial in the ancient Church in order to discern whether the catechumens "had properly completed their catechumenate, had honoured the widows, visited the sick and done good works" (*Traditio Apostolica*, n. 20).

You are justifiably concerned about the constant deterioration of the family institution with grave repercussions both on the social structure and on ecclesial life. In this regard it is necessary to promote the good of the family, to defend its rights in the appropriate institutions and to develop a pastoral viewpoint that protects it and provides direct help in difficulty. Thus, adequate pre-matrimonial catechesis is of paramount importance, as well as daily closeness that brings encouragement to each home and makes Jesus' greeting ring out in it: "Today, salvation has come to this house" (Lk 19: 9). Do not forget the groups of married couples and families who must help one another to achieve their lofty and indispensable vocation, or the specific services that alleviate the painful situations created by the separation of husband and wife, by a precarious financial situation or by domestic violence whose victims are above all women.

At the end of this meeting, I would like to assure you of my special closeness together with my prayers to the Lord for your ministry. I ask you to convey my affection to your faithful and most especially to the priests, religious communities and consecrated people, as well as to the catechists and to all who are involved in the gripping task of taking Christ's light to this blessed Land of Costa Rica and keeping it alive.

I ask the Virgin Mary Most Holy, invoked by Costa Ricans with the title "Our Lady of the Angels", to protect her children in this beloved Nation and bring them tenderly to know and love her divine Son increasingly. To them and you, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.

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