



The Holy See

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

Thursday, 24 January 2008

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,

It gives me great joy to welcome you, dear Pastors of the Church in Slovenia, as your visit *ad limina Apostolorum* is drawing to a close. I greet you with affection and I am grateful to Archbishop Alojzij Uran, Metropolitan Archbishop of Ljubljana and President of your Episcopal Conference, for the courteous words he has just addressed to me.

Since your previous *ad limina* visit in April 2001, your Country has experienced changes of considerable importance at the level of civil institutions. First of all, on 1 May 2004, Slovenia became a member of the European Union and the Bishops addressed a Pastoral Letter to all the faithful for the occasion. Then, on 1 January 2007, the Country adopted the single European currency. Lastly, at the end of last year, it was integrated into the context of the Schengen Treaty for free circulation. As if to crown this development, the presidency of the European Union has been entrusted to Slovenia for this six-month term.

These important events which I am pleased to recall are not of an ecclesial nature, yet they concern the Church because they concern the life of the people, in particular the horizon of values in Europe, as the above-mentioned Pastoral Letter of 23 April 2004 emphasized. This Letter may appear a bit overly optimistic today. It naturally proposed an evaluation of the positive aspects but did not neglect to mention the problems and dangers. Four years after Slovenia's entry into the European Union, it seems to me to have preserved all its value, as you said: if Europe wishes to remain and to become increasingly a land of peace, preserving respect for the dignity of the human person as one of its fundamental values, it cannot deny the principal component - at the spiritual and ethical level - of its foundations: in other words, Christianity. Not all forms of humanism are equal nor are they equivalent from the moral viewpoint. I am not referring here to

the religious aspects but limit myself to the ethical and social dimensions. In fact, the consequences for civil coexistence differ according to the anthropological vision adopted. If, for example, man conceives of himself, in accordance with a trend that is widespread today, in an individualistic manner, how can the effort to build a just and supportive community be justified? In this regard I would like to return to a statement in your Letter mentioned above: "Christianity is the religion of hope: hope in life, in unending happiness, in creating brotherhood among all human beings". This is true for every continent and is also true in a Europe where many intellectuals still find it hard to accept the fact that "reason and faith need each other in order to fulfil their true nature and their mission" (Encyclical *Spe Salvi*, n. 23).

Here we recognize the principal challenge which the Church in Slovenia must contend with today. Secularism with a Western stamp, different from and perhaps more subtle than the Marxist brand, is showing us very worrying signs. Only think, for example, of the unbridled search for material goods, the reduced birth rate, and further, the dwindling religious practice, together with a tangible decrease in vocations to the priesthood and the consecrated life. The Slovene Ecclesial Community has already been dedicated for some time to responding to the challenges of secularism at different levels and in various directions. I am pleased first of all to recall the National Plenary Council which you held between 1999 and 2000, whose theme echoed the words Moses addressed to the People of Israel as it was about to enter the Promised Land: "Choose life" (Dt 30: 19). Every generation is called to renew this choice between "life and good, death and evil" (cf. Dt 30: 15). And we Pastors are duty-bound to point out the path of life to Christians, so that they in turn may be salt and light in society. I therefore encourage the Church in Slovenia to respond to the materialistic and selfish culture with a consistent evangelizing action which begins in the parishes: indeed, it is from parish communities rather than from other structures that initiatives can and must come, as well as from concrete acts of Christian witness. This is facilitated by the restructuring of the ecclesiastical circumscriptions which I organized in 2006, creating three new dioceses and raising Maribor to the rank of a Metropolitan See, in order to ensure that Bishops might be closer to their priests and faithful and accompany them more effectively on their journey of faith, as well as in their apostolic commitment.

Dear and venerable Brothers, you have convoked a National Eucharistic Congress for the spring of 2009 and have also invited me to visit your Country on this occasion. As I thank you for your courteous gesture and entrust this project to the Lord, I must praise you from this moment for your initiative of convoking the entire Community around the Eucharistic Mystery, source and summit of the Church's life and mission (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, nn. 1, 11). My venerable Predecessor John Paul II ended his long Pontificate by encouraging us to turn our hearts to the Eucharist. I accepted his invitation and, following the Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the Eucharist celebrated in October 2005, I wrote the Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis*. You therefore have a great wealth of teachings on which to draw for the preparation of your Congress, an ecclesial event which I am sure will be a propitious opportunity for your Communities to take up the conclusions of the recent Slovene Plenary Council and carry forward their

implementation.

The Eucharist and the Word of God - the upcoming Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops will be dedicated to the latter - are the Church's true treasure. Faithful to Jesus' teaching, every community must use earthly goods simply as a service to the Gospel and consistently with Gospel dictates. In this regard, the New Testament is very rich in teachings and normative examples so that, in every age, Pastors can correctly present the delicate problem of temporal goods and their appropriate use. In the Church in every period the testimony of evangelical poverty has been an essential element of evangelization as it was in the life of Christ. It is therefore essential for everyone, Pastors and faithful alike, to be committed to personal and communal conversion in order that ever greater fidelity to the Gospel in the administration of Church property may offer to all the witness of a Christian people determined to be in tune with Christ's teachings.

Venerable and dear Brothers, I thank the Lord who in these days has granted us to revive the bonds of communion, both your own and those of your Churches, with the See of Peter. May Bl. Anton Martin Slomsek and the other Saints who are particularly venerated in your Communities protect and support you. May Mary Most Holy, Mother of the Church, always watch over your ministry and obtain abundant heavenly graces for you. For my part, I assure you of my remembrance in prayer and cordially impart to you the Apostolic Blessing, which I extend to all the faithful entrusted to your pastoral care.