



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS OF ARGENTINA
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Tuesday, 12 February 2002

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

1. I am pleased to receive you, dear Bishops of the Argentine Republic who are making your *ad limina* visit, to strengthen the bonds of love and communion with the Successor of Peter and the Church of Rome, for "*in union with this Church the faithful of the whole world have preserved the Apostolic Tradition*" (St Irenaeus, *Adv. Haeres*, III, 3). I welcome you with the words of the Apostle Paul, wishing you "*grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus, the Lord*" (1 Tm 1,2). I would like to greet all the priests, religious and faithful of your dioceses, whom I embrace in spirit and to whom I renew my affection in the Lord.

I cordially thank Archbishop Eduardo Vicente Mirás of Rosario for his kind words, reaffirming your sentiments of loyalty to the Pope and for explaining to me the path you have taken, even among present difficulties, for the joyful announcement of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I answer by thanking you for the tireless work you realize in every sector, and I encourage you to carry on in the midst of the present challenges with confidence and teaching confidence in God's loving Providence.

2. Since you are the successors of the Apostles, you are in the midst of your particular Churches as pastors who act *in persona Christi Capitis*, taking the place of Christ himself, Teacher, Shepherd and Priest (cf. *Lumen gentium*, n. 21). You consecrate your life and activity to the apostolic service of transmitting the faith and fostering the life of charity among the People of God. As ministers of the Gospel, who make the Lord visibly and eminently present, you are called to be witnesses and servants of Gospel hope, exercising the threefold *munus* of sanctifying, teaching and governing (cf. *ibid.*, n. 21). Therefore, I invite you, at this time of deep anxiety for the world

and for the welfare of the beloved Argentine nation, to continue to fulfill for your faithful and for all people the timely service of keeping alive the true hope that is the risen Lord Jesus Christ.

3. Your country is going through a severe social and economic crisis that impinges upon the whole society, and, in addition, threatens the democratic stability and the solidity of the public institutions, with consequences reaching far beyond your own borders. In many homes, even basic and indispensable necessities are lacking, exposing many people to a future full of risks and uncertainty.

The concerns of the present time must lead to a serious examination of conscience about the responsibilities of each one and the tragic consequences of a greedy self absorption, of the corruption reported by many, and of the thoughtless mismanagement of the national assets. In particular, you have offered to the faithful and persons of good will realistic documents that, from an evangelical point of view, warned about the future. During your last *ad limina* visit, in 1995, I already referred to this pointing out that: "corruption and its impunity run the risk of becoming widespread, with the regrettable result of social apathy and scepticism" (*Address to the Bishops' Conference of Argentina*, 11 November 1995, n. 4; *L'Osservatore Romano*, English edition, 22 November 1995, p. 3). At the root of this distressing situation is a profound moral crisis, as you pointed out, and so the first step must be "*the cultivation of moral values, especially, austerity, the sentiment of equity and justice, the value of work, respect for the law and for keeping one's word*" (*Message of the Permanent Commission of the Argentine Bishops' Conference*, 8 January 2002).

At this time there is naturally a need for the proper technical means that will restore the economy and ensure that no Argentinians lack what they need to develop as persons and citizens. It is not up to the institutional Church to point out the best ways to do this, since it is the task of government leaders and experts in the various social sciences. However, although the Church's mission is of the purely religious order, this does not prevent her from offering her collaboration in fostering a national dialogue among all the leaders so that each one may cooperate actively to overcome the crisis. Dialogue excludes violence of all kinds such as killing and looting, and helps to build a more human future with the cooperation of all, thus avoiding a radical impoverishment of society. It is right to remember that the social situation is not improved merely by applying technical means, but also and above all, by promoting reforms that have a human and moral basis that are inspired by an ethical consideration of the person, the family and society.

Thus, only a new proposal of such basic moral values as honesty, austerity, responsibility for the common good, solidarity, the spirit of sacrifice, and the value of work, in a land like yours that Providence created so fertile and productive, can ensure a better development of all the members of the national community.

4. The situation in Argentina can also be the cause of division and foster hatred and resentment among those who are called to be the ongoing builders of the country. I therefore invite you to

continue to guide your people as ministers of reconciliation, so that the flock entrusted to you, overcoming the difficulties of the present time, may advance on the paths of harmony and sincere love for all, without exception. You know well that the future of the country must be based on peace, the fruit of justice (cf. Jas 3,18). Follow this way, help to build a society that encourages consensus, harmony and respect for each person and his fundamental rights! With your courageous and timely words, and always keeping in mind the requirements of the common good, you must encourage all, starting with those who have political, parliamentary, administrative and judicial responsibility for the nation, to promote more just conditions of life, work and housing.

Even though the extent of the phenomenon undoubtedly involves external ingredients for which it is necessary to seek help abroad, one must bear in mind that the Argentinians themselves, with the wonderful qualities that distinguish them, must take the leading role and be principal agents and architects of the reconstruction of their country, striving with all their might and hard work to overcome this complicated situation.

5. While waiting for the solutions adopted to give positive results, it is a great help to encourage charitable activities and social assistance, a duty the Church has always performed, to make more bearable the living conditions of the less fortunate. Dear Brothers, you are to be concerned with the situation of persons who suffer and lack the basic necessities. I am thinking particularly of older retired persons, the unemployed and those who have lost everything in financial reverses. In this regard, I am reassured by the various initiatives begun by each diocese to take adequate care of the needs of the poor. I mention as praiseworthy the initiatives of Caritas and of many parishes and religious institutes, as well as the collection that is now an annual event "*Más por menos*" (more for those who have less), and many other fine activities. They ask Christians to give up something necessary, and not just their superfluous, fostering an attitude of sharing with their neighbours.

This involvement is "part of the Church's evangelizing mission" (*Sollecitudo rei socialis*, n. 41), where an important place is reserved for human promotion. Therefore, pastors must guide the faithful in this field; all are called to collaborate actively in the service of charity, at this crucial moment in Argentina's history, fostering and spurring on suitable initiatives that are already in place to confront the situations of poverty and marginalization that bear upon many needy brethren.

Coordination with the different state institutions and NGO's will provide more effective assistance to your neighbour, helping him not to be carried away by the illusions of profit and consumerism, but to rely on the best traditions of sobriety, solidarity and generosity that abide in your people's hearts.

6. My review of your quinquennial reports and my personal conversation with each one of you highlights the vitality of the Church in Argentina, with her successes and progress, her projects

and efforts, as well as the human limitations that must inevitably be taken into account within the framework of continuous and faithful fulfillment of the mission that Christ the Lord entrusted to his Church: to be an instrument of salvation for all, capable of inspiring an activity that will transform society.

In the exercise of your mission as pastors, it is always necessary to preserve affective and effective communion with the See of Peter and with one another. The will to preserve this spirit, evident in your assemblies and other gatherings, so as to offer mutual help and complementary views of the different pastoral issues, is a positive ecclesial experience. At the same time, you have to be a good example for priests, parishes and civil society itself, that has to face different viewpoints and conflicts of interest.

7. To be able to carry on the Church's task in Argentina, I invite you to realize the need to rely on a sufficient number of evangelizers in quantity and quality, priests, men and women religious and consecrated persons, who bring the Gospel to all nations.

This entails constant attention to the problem of vocations to lives of special consecration. In this regard, you need to depend on healthy, stable families, founded on true domestic values, in which the seeds of a vocation can spring up and grow in a suitable climate. You need parish or school organizations, and those associated with the new apostolic movements, as a favourable environment for the integration of young persons into a lifestyle that shows concern for others and gives an education based on faith. Experience teaches that vocations to the priesthood and to a life of special consecration are often born in these conditions, and at educational centres with a Christian orientation, where dedication to evangelization is combined with the objective of bringing about human and technical maturity.

Young persons, even mature and formed persons, must be received, feel loved, and be followed in seminaries and houses of formation by the use of a process that will help develop their vocation so that they can become servants of God, for the good of the faithful and their neighbour in need. To collaborate with this most important task, it is vital to be careful to choose the most capable persons with lives of great integrity, because on their work depends a promising future for the Church.

I am aware of the foresight of your Bishops' Conference that recently completed a study of vocational trends in Argentina. It is reassuring to note that in certain aspects there has been an increase, but the fact that they are decreasing in proportion to the increase in the population must spur you to redouble your efforts to prepare the ecclesial future of every diocese.

8. Dear Brothers, I conclude this meeting in the hope that you may take back with you the encouragement and support of the Pope, to continue in the self-sacrificing, and sometimes, joyful gift of yourselves to the Church and to the society in which you exercise your ministry. I know the

difficulties that you and your co-workers face every day. Yet Jesus Christ, the perfect model of the Pastor, will give you the strength for a faithful service, and peace of mind in perseverance, "*expectantes beatam spem et adventum Salvatoris nostri Jesu Christi*" ("awaiting the blessed hope and coming of our Saviour Jesus Christ": Ordinary of Mass, prayer after the Our Father).

I ask you to bring to your priests, men and women religious, seminarians, the members of ecclesial movements and laity involved in the Church's mission, and to all the faithful, the Pope's greeting and the assurance of his prayers that each one may persevere in faith, and be strengthened on the Christian journey through life, and in his resolution to live a responsible universal love.

To you, and to the entire beloved Argentine people, especially those who are suffering more in this painful trial, with great fondness, I impart my Apostolic Blessing.