



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE SECOND GROUP OF ARGENTINIAN BISHOPS
ON THEIR AD LIMINA VISIT**

Tuesday, 5 March 2002

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

1. I am pleased to greet you cordially, the second group of *Argentinian Bishops* to make your *ad limina* visit. During your pilgrimage to the tombs of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul and at the meetings with the Bishop of Rome and his collaborators, you will find fresh energy to persevere in your episcopal mission, knowing that Christ never abandons his Church (cf. Mt 28,20) and guides her with the strength of his Spirit so that she may be a sign of salvation. May he, the Teacher of pastors, fill you with hope and enable you to witness to it in your lives (cf. I Pt 3,15), and to edify all the faithful entrusted to your pastoral care.

I am grateful to Archbishop Estanislao Karlic, Archbishop of Paraná and President of the Argentinian Bishops' Conference, for his kind words renewing each one's loyalty and that of the ecclesial communities over which, in the name of the Lord, you preside, presenting to me the pastoral orientations that guide your ministry so that the men and women of the beloved Argentinian nation may walk towards intimate communion with the Triune God. At this time the Church must advance with the extraordinary dynamism of the outpouring of grace that flows like "a river of living water" from the still recent celebration of the Great Jubilee (cf. *Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 1), and should be expressed in fervent resolutions and concrete action (cf. *ibid.* n. 3).

2. In this regard, I want to thank you for the great pains you took to put into practice the guidelines set out in the Apostolic Letter *Tertio millennio adveniente* for the preparation and celebration of the Great Jubilee. I want to recall the National Eucharistic Congress in Argentina, held during the year 2000, that included a serious examination of conscience encouraging the spirit of reconciliation. In the same spirit you concluded a broad and far-reaching consultation with the particular Churches

and Christian communities to put into practice the *Pastoral guidelines for the New Evangelization* that were approved in 1990. You completed all this by accepting the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio ineunte* and reflecting upon it, adopting its pastoral criteria so as to publish them soon with the relevant title "*Navega mar adentro*" (Put out into the deep).

I would like to encourage you in your options so you can be more effective in the new evangelization: bringing creative perseverance to the daily actions of normal pastoral ministry, cordial acceptance and renewal in holiness by parish communities, combined with a sound Christian formation that will encourage missionary commitment among the laity.

As I pointed out in my Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio ineunte*, we now find ourselves facing the "larger and more demanding challenge of normal pastoral activity" (n. 29), always a pressing task. This does not mean that each one should carry out his own work guided by his own personal criteria, but on the contrary, that each should conform to the criteria set out by the pastoral plan of his own Diocese, accepting common priorities and responding to the Argentinian people's current need for evangelization.

Do not hesitate to put your zeal and pastoral energy into the new evangelization, deeply convinced that it will enlighten the action of lay Christians and be an effective and lasting remedy for the harsh and serious evils that many of the citizens of your nation are suffering.

3. In your pastoral activity, you rely on the help of priests who are united to their Bishop, as St Ignatius of Antioch so beautifully puts it, "*like the strings to the lyre*" (*To the Ephesians* 4,1).

Through their ordination they have received a special consecration that designates them to "*preach the Gospel, shepherd the faithful and celebrate divine worship as true priests of the New Testament*" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 28), since they are the sign and expression of the pastoral charity of Christ in the mission of teaching, sanctifying and governing the people entrusted to their care. They share in the mission entrusted by Christ himself and recognized by the Church, that has to be lived not as the mere exercise of a human function but safeguarded every day as a precious gift of God.

Priests must remember that first and foremost they are men of God, and can therefore never neglect their spiritual life. All their activity "*must begin effectively with prayer*" (St Albert the Great, *Commentary on mystical theology*, 15). Among the multiple activities that fill the day of every priest, his top priority must be the celebration of the Eucharist that conforms him to the Eternal High Priest.

In God's presence he finds the strength to live the challenges of the ministry and the docility to do the will of Him who has called him and consecrated him, sent him out and entrusted to him a special and necessary mission. The constant celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours, personal

prayer, diligent meditation of the Word of God, devotion to the Mother of the Lord and of the Church and the veneration of the saints are precious instruments that he cannot do without if he is to affirm the splendour of his own identity and to ensure the fruitful exercise of his priestly ministry.

Since it is a demanding mission and in the present circumstances it is often difficult, it is up to you, bishops, to help priests, guide them, follow them with concern for their needs and offer them the material, spiritual and formative means to enable them to live their own ministry with joy and dignity. When they will feel welcomed by you their fathers, they can advance to meet men and women, to announce the Gospel to them enthusiastically and to make them disciples of the Lord!

4. Parish life is the usual way in which the faithful of every class and walk of life take part in the life of the Church and receive God's grace. In the Apostolic Letter *Dies Domini*, I wrote: "among the many activities of a parish, "none is as vital or as community-forming as the Sunday celebration of the Lord's Day and his Eucharist" (n. 35) since in it Christ is eminently present in his Church as the source and summit of ecclesial life. For this reason the Second Vatican Council recommends that "*parish priests should ensure that the celebration of the Eucharistic Sacrifice is the centre and culmination of the entire life of the Christian community*" (*Christus Dominus*, n. 30).

As Pastors you are well aware of the importance of the Mass for building, developing and revitalizing Christian communities. Nothing can ever supply for the Mass, even though in the absence of a priest, the Liturgy of the Word may be useful for keeping alive the faith, the goal to which we tend in the regular celebration of the Eucharist.

The Mass, with the twofold table of the Word and of the Eucharist, ensures that the faithful may have life and have it abundantly (cf. Jn 10,10), receiving life from Christ himself who in this way shapes and nourishes his Church. In the same vein, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* recalls that "*the Sunday celebration of the Lord's Day and his Eucharist are at the heart of the Church's life*" (n. 2177), since it makes Christians relive "with particular intensity the experience of the Apostles on the evening of Easter when the Risen Lord appeared to them as they were gathered together (cf. Jn 20,19)" (*Dies Domini*, n. 33).

It is therefore necessary to develop the pastoral action that encourages the faithful to participate more regularly in the Sunday Eucharist, that must be lived not only as a precept but also as a requirement deeply engraved in Christian life. For this reason I wrote: "It is crucially important that all the faithful should be convinced that they cannot live their faith or share fully in the life of the Christian community unless they take part regularly in the Sunday Eucharistic assembly" (*ibid.*, n. 81).

Recently, I pointed out that it was necessary "to stress particularly the Sunday Eucharist and Sunday itself, experienced as a special day of faith, the day of the Risen Lord and of the gift of the Spirit, a true Easter each week" (*Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 35).

5. Another field of pastoral action that calls for special attention is the promotion and defence of the institution of the family, today attacked on all fronts by multiple and subtle kinds of argumentation.

We are witnessing a current, that is widespread in many places, that tends to undermine the true nature of marriage. Occasionally, for many reasons, even Catholics do not receive the sacrament of marriage in order to begin their union of love. It is important to remember that Christ "*now encounters Christian spouses through the sacrament of marriage. He abides with them in order that by their mutual self-giving spouses will love each other with enduring fidelity, as he loved the Church and delivered himself for it*" (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 48).

I know how involved you are in safeguarding and promoting this institution, whose origin is in God and his plan of salvation (cf. *Familiaris consortio*, n. 49). The spread of marital and family crises must not lead to despair or to giving up; on the contrary, it must spur us on to proclaim, with pastoral firmness and as an authentic service to the family and society, the truth about marriage and the family as established by God. To give up doing so would be a serious pastoral omission that would lead into error believers and those who have responsibility of making decisions for the common good of the nation. This truth is not only valid for Catholics but for all men and women without distinction, since marriage and the family are an indispensable good of society that cannot be indifferent to the loss of respect for it or to the loss of its identity.

Thus dedicated couples in the Church, with the help of their pastors, must strive to deepen their knowledge of the theology of marriage and help young couples and families in difficulty to recognise better the value of their sacramental commitment, and to receive the grace of the covenant that they sealed when they were baptized. Christian families must be the first to witness to the greatness of family and married life, founded on mutual love and fidelity. Through the sacrament, their human love acquires a superior value because the spouses manifest the love of Christ for his Church and accept an important responsibility in the world: that of bringing forth children who are called to become children of God, and of helping them in their human and supernatural growth.

Dear Brothers, follow families, foster pastoral care for families in your dioceses, and promote the movements and associations for the spirituality of marriage; awaken their apostolic zeal, so that they may make their own the task of the new evangelization and open their doors to those who live in difficult situations and witness to the great dignity of unselfish, unconditional love.

You should not forget that those who are preparing to receive the sacrament of Marriage (cf. *CIC*, cann. 1063-1064) should receive a satisfactory preparation. This is the way to favour and form authentic families that live in accord with the plan of God. In carrying out this task, it is necessary to present to the future spouses not only the anthropological aspects of human love, but also the

bases of a real conjugal spirituality, accepting marriage as a vocation that enables a baptized person to incarnate faith, hope and charity in a new personal, social and religious situation.

In completing this specific preparation, one can take the opportunity to re-evangelize baptized persons who approach the Church to ask for the sacrament of Marriage. Even if today, thanks to the spread of teaching, young people are often better educated than their parents, in many cases this does not correspond to a greater formation in Christian life, since at times not only are the young generations lacking in serious religious knowledge, but even more sadly, they lack a moral compass and any sense of the the transcendent goal of life.

6. Dear Brothers, with these reflections I would like to encourage you in your service to the Church of God on her pilgrimage in Argentina. In a few days' time, you will be back in your country to motivate priests and faithful to live the Lenten journey and with renewed vigour to celebrate the Easter mystery, the summit of the liturgical year. First of all greet the young people on my behalf, called to be the "sentinels of the dawn" of the new millennium, the hope of the Church and of the nation, and especially the young Argentinians who are preparing for the priesthood in the seminaries and in the houses of formation; the families, schools of rich humanity and Christian virtues; the poor and the needy, who must continue to be the object of your care and attention; professionals in the various fields of human activity, who must be the builders of the country and of a renewed society at this special time in your history; the sick and the elderly; the priests and the other consecrated persons, witnesses of the transcendent in a world in which everything is changing and appears difficult. May the Blessings of the Lord descend upon you and upon your Christian communities, through the intercession of *Our Lady of Luján*, Mother of all Argentinians, whose mantle reflects the colours of your country's flag! To confirm these desires and to go with you in spirit, I willingly impart to you and to all the Argentinian faithful my Apostolic Blessing.