



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE CATHOLIC HIERARCHY OF EGYPT
AT THE END OF THEIR AD LIMINA VISIT TO ROME**

Castel Gandolfo

Saturday, 30 August 2003

Your Beatitude,

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

1. I welcome you with great joy. You have just completed your *ad limina* visit by praying at the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul, united witnesses of fidelity to Christ to the point of spilling their blood, and by coming to show your communion with the Successor of Peter. I thank your Patriarch, H.B. Cardinal Stéphanos II Ghattas, for his kind words enabling me to share in your joys, difficulties and hopes as Pastors. I am particularly pleased to greet those of you who are taking part for the first time in this rich experience of communion in the faith and in service to the Lord. I thank God with you for all the Christian communities in Egypt, heirs to the first proclamation of the Gospel by St Mark. I remember with joy and emotion my Jubilee pilgrimage to Cairo and to the Monastery of St Catherine at the foot of Mount Sinai; one understands better there the unique roots of Christian revelation in this part of the world and its intrinsic link with the Old Testament.

2. At the beginning of our meeting, I would like to encourage you in your specific mission as Pastors. You have become Bishops by sacramental ordination, successors of the Apostles and primarily responsible, together with the Successor of Peter, for the proclamation of the Good News to the whole world. I know how much you have at heart to make the communities entrusted to your care living communities that are authentic witnesses of the Gospel "in deed and in truth", as St John invites us to be (1 Jn 3: 18). In the heart of Egyptian society, so rich in history and culture and strongly marked by the presence of Islam, you know that the most important witness is that of daily life, centred on the twofold commandment of love of God and love of neighbour. Together with the priests, the men and women Religious and all the laypeople who live immersed in the world, you want to witness to everyone to the greatness and beauty of human life, called to serve the glory of its Creator and one day to share it, in the joy of the world to come. At the beginning of the third

millennium the mission field is wide open to the Church, which desires to be the voice of the lowly and the poor, to hear the call of all who aspire to peace, to welcome refugees deprived of their country and home, and by so doing to serve the true dignity of every human being.

You hope, legitimately, that the Church in Egypt will be open to the universal dimension, attached to ecclesial communion, and that, in an ongoing exchange, she will be glad to give and to receive the common treasure of the faith. I strongly encourage you to continue the fraternal task you are carrying out in the Assembly of the Catholic Hierarchy of Egypt, when you meet with bishops of different rites in order to help one another in your responsibilities as pastors and to deepen together the bonds of true Catholic unity. Know that the Pope accompanies you in this noble task of fraternal collaboration, which serves the good of all your faithful and expresses and builds ecclesial communion.

3. The priests are your most important collaborators in the ministry, and I know that you esteem their pastoral work and their readiness to serve their brethren. They are often strongly attached to a pastoral ministry of closeness which makes them, as it were, like fathers of their community, concerned to visit the families, to share in their problems and hopes and to encourage them in their daily lives. Assure them of the Pope's deep gratitude for the beautiful witness of their pastoral charity. Encourage them to continue their formation through the study of the word of God and contemplation of the mysteries of the faith, applying the means that the Magisterium of the universal Church has made available to all, especially the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Through adapted sessions of continuing formation, help them become better acquainted with the contemporary world, marked by ever more numerous, ceaseless exchanges, so that they may perceive its difficulties and expectations more clearly and find new ways of proclaiming Christ to it.

After Christ's example and through their sacramental ministry, centred on the Eucharist which gives life to the Church (cf. *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, n. 21) and also through a life of personal prayer punctuated by the Divine Office, the prayer of the Church, and edified by meetings linked to the pastoral ministry, may they be intercessors with God for the whole community! I share your hope that all priests may live a dignified and sober life and benefit as far as possible from the same protection and assistance in the social context, despite the disparity of wealth which may affect your dioceses and which I urge you to compensate for with brotherly sharing.

4. Your Church has the good fortune to have a sufficient number of priests and to be able to ordain new priests each year, thanks to the vocations, numerous as yet, and to the work accomplished by the Maadi Major Seminary. I warmly thank the team of formators whom I ask to persevere with zeal and devotion in their work of discernment and the training of future pastors for the good of all the Catholic Churches in Egypt, since the seminary is both inter-diocesan and inter-ritual. I know that in all your eparchies you are also concerned with setting up proper vocations apostolates that will guarantee the Lord's and the Church's permanent call to young people not only with regard to vocations as diocesan priests, indispensable pastors of the Christian people, but also to the

consecrated life of both men and women. In the universal Church, many countries are currently suffering from a long drawn-out crisis of vocations, in addition to the lack of priests: so those who have had the grace to escape this must carefully cultivate this precious good that the Lord gives to his Church, and perhaps also prepare themselves to share it by doing some mission work in other Churches of other lands.

5. As I have often had the pleasure of repeating, young people are the future of the Church, and this is especially true in your country, whose greatest treasure is its youth. They therefore require help in training to take on their future responsibilities through an appropriate education. Catholic schools, with a great wealth of experience, should devote special care to young people, assuring them a balanced, healthy human formation with firm moral reference points. They must provide them with a solid Christian formation, faithful to the spirit and norms of catechetical teaching perfected by the Bishops, who are primarily responsible for this, just as they are for the Catholic schools. The parishes and dioceses, at their own level, can also offer young Christians catechetical, moral and spiritual formation programmes which will enable them to acquire a deeper knowledge of their personal faith and motivate them to be more deeply committed.

6. The role of Religious in your dioceses is noteworthy, primarily because of their specific witness to making love of God the priority in every Christian life through the profession of the evangelical counsels, which consecrate them totally to the Lord. Their active participation in the pastoral work of your dioceses is equally valuable, especially in the Catholic schools and parishes, in the area of health care and social and charitable institutions, but also in the more specific fields of theological research, cultural ministry and interreligious dialogue. I warmly thank them. I am delighted with the excellent collaboration that distinguishes the relations between your dioceses and the religious congregations and institutes that are present there for the good of one and all. In particular, I greet the communities of women Religious which are often small and scattered over vast territories, because they too want to assure the Christian people of their support, through prayer and through the assistance of their apostolic work in the schools or dispensaries that they open for the people with no distinctions of race or creed, thus expressing the universal character of Christ's love. They also need all your encouragement to continue to grow spiritually in love for the Lord, through prayer, listening to the Word of God and humbly and attentively serving their brothers and sisters.

7. The Catholic Church in Egypt claims no special advantages for herself but merely the right to live the grace that the Lord has given her by calling her to his service in this nation. I acknowledge the important work the Catholic Church carries out in Egyptian society in the field of social assistance and education, in the service of women's promotion, in assistance to mothers and children, in the fight against illiteracy, thereby taking her place in the country's development.

I encourage you to maintain good relations with your Christian brothers and sisters of other denominations, especially with the Coptic Orthodox Church, and to do your utmost to spread the spirit of a true ecumenical dialogue. Do not be disheartened by the difficulties of the present or the

future, but remain firm in your desire to be faithful to the Lord's commandment: "Even as I have loved you, that you also love one another" (Jn 13: 34), knowing that the bonds of fraternal charity do not prevent us from acting in conformity with truth and justice, but on the contrary, demand it.

The dialogue with Islam is particularly important in your country where this is the religion of the majority, but it also sets an example for the dialogue between the great world religions, which is vital following the tragic events linked to terrorism that marked the beginning of the third millennium and whose causes public opinion might be tempted to ascribe to religion. I would like to remind you how essential it is that the world religions join forces to denounce terrorism and to work together at the service of justice, peace and brotherhood among men and women.

8. Through the intercession of St Mark the Evangelist, I invoke upon you the motherly protection of Our Lady, so deeply venerated by the Christians of Egypt, and I ask the Lord to fill you with the gifts of his Spirit. Shepherds, "tend the flock of God that is your charge, not by constraint but willingly, as God would have it, not for shameful gain but eagerly, not as domineering over those in your charge but being examples to the flock" (I Pt 5: 2-3). Dear Brothers in the Episcopate, take back to all your faithful the warm greetings and fatherly encouragement of the Successor of Peter! I impart an affectionate Apostolic Blessing to all.