



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS OF BRAZIL
FROM THE FIRST SOUTHERN REGION
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Thursday, 23 January 2003

Your Eminences,

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate, 1. After meeting each one of you personally over the last few days, I am glad to meet all of you gathered as a body, and, through you, to thank God for this opportunity to enter into contact with the Christian communities you represent and to convey a sincere and affectionate greeting to them all. Dear Brothers, please give them my cordial best wishes and assure the priests, religious, Christian laity, the young people, the sick and all the members of the people of God of my spiritual solidarity. I thank Bishop Fernando Antônio Figueiredo of Santo Amaro, President of your *1st Southern Region*, for his kind attention and his words of respect on your behalf. 2. "Our times", I wrote in the Encyclical *Redemptoris missio*, "are both momentous and fascinating. While on the one hand, people seem to be pursuing material prosperity and to be sinking ever deeper into consumerism and materialism, on the other hand we are witnessing a desperate search for meaning, the need for an inner life, and a desire to learn new forms and methods of meditation and prayer. Not only in cultures with strong religious elements, but also in secularized societies, the spiritual dimension of life is being sought after as an antidote to dehumanization" (n. 33). This is the so-called "religious revival" which, if not devoid of ambiguity, also holds ferments and incentives that should not be ignored. You note the widespread need for God among your people, who are traditionally anchored to the perennial principles of Christianity, but are subjected to several sorts of negative influences. Is not the phenomenon of the sects that are spreading intermittently from one area to another, with periods of relentless proselytism among the culturally and socially disadvantaged, a concrete sign of an unsatisfied hunger for the supernatural? Doesn't this present a real challenge, for you Pastors, to renew the style of the welcome within your ecclesial communities, and also a pressing incentive to embark on a new and courageous evangelization that can create adequate forms of catechesis, especially for adults? You know well that the basis of the spread of the sects is often a great lack of religious formation, consequently leading to uncertainty about the need to believe in Christ and to belong to the Church he has established. The tendency is to reduce religions and the various spiritual experiences to a least common denominator, that makes them practically equivalent, with the result that everyone would be free to follow any of the various paths proposed to reach the goal of salvation. If, in addition, one adds the brazen proselytism which is the hallmark of certain particularly active and invasive groups of these sects, one understands right away how urgently necessary it is today to support the faith of Christians,

and to give them an opportunity for ongoing religious formation to deepen their personal relationship with Christ. Your endeavours must give priority to preventing this danger, consolidating in the faithful the practice of the Christian life and fostering the growth of a truly fraternal spirit in the heart of each of your ecclesial communities.³ From Rome I followed with special interest the celebration of the 14th National Eucharistic Congress in Campinas. A multitude of Brazilians gathered round the Eucharist, in the presence of my representative and special Legate, Cardinal José Saraiva Martins. Above all, it was a moment of communion, vitality and hopeful celebration for the Church today in Brazil. I hope that this event will awaken the Christian conscience of the laity of your land and encourage them to dedicate themselves to an exemplary life that will strengthen the bonds of communion and reconciliation in faith and love, and will also act as leaven for that inner renewal I have already mentioned. Indeed, the Eucharist is the supreme spiritual good of the Church because it contains Christ himself, our Pasch and Living Bread, who through his flesh gives life to the world (cf. *Presbyterorum ordinis*, n. 5). In this way, just as the heart gives vitality to all the parts of the human body, so the Eucharistic life will reach - starting from the altar of sacrifice, from the real presence and from communion - to all the parts of the ecclesial body, and will make its saving effects felt even in the complex fabric of society by means of Christians who today prolong the Redeemer's action in the world.⁴ The Eucharist must therefore be at the centre of pastoral activity to radiate its supernatural force to all the Christian places of evangelization, catechesis and various charitable activities, in the work of social renewal and justice for all, starting with respect for the life and rights of every person, and with dedication to the family, to education at all levels, to the proper political order and the promotion of public and private morality. However, for the Eucharist to have its full effect, one must always be concerned about a worthy and genuine celebration of the mystery in accord with the Church's teaching and directives, as I have recalled on several occasions (cf. Letter *Dominicae Caenae*, n. 12). Indeed in the celebration of the Eucharist, the Church, in addition to participating in the redemptive efficacy of the mystery of Christ, carries out a *pedagogy of faith and life* through the proclamation of the Word, prayers, rites and the entire ecclesial symbolism of the liturgy. For this reason, any manipulation of these elements can only have a negative impact on the pedagogy of faith; and a proper, active and consistent participation in the liturgy, in accord with the norms approved by the Church, builds up the faith and life of the faithful. So I wish to urge you to maintain the genuine celebration of the liturgy, doing your utmost to ensure obedience to the instructions of the Holy See and those that come under the responsibility of your Bishops' Conference. In this, remember that it is the duty of Bishops to be "moderators, promoters, and custodians of the whole liturgical life of the Church" in their respective dioceses (can. 835 1).⁵ In the perspective of this pastoral service, I would like to submit for your consideration certain matters on which I have been insisting for some time in order to give a new impulse to evangelization in the communities entrusted to your care. How is it possible to overlook, first of all, my appeal "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, the true weekly Easter" (*Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 35)? In an age of mass popular manifestations that are sometimes inspired by superficial goals, it becomes necessary to restore, through the prayer of thanksgiving, the inner world of the soul which is infinitely richer in values and hope. "Yes, dear brothers and sisters, our Christian communities must become *genuine "schools" of prayer*, where the meeting with Christ is expressed not just in asking for help but also in thanksgiving, praise, adoration, contemplation" (*ibid.*, n. 33). What does this mean other than that we should give a new impulse to the value of the Eucharist, both at Mass and in Eucharistic events such as congresses, Eucharistic processions, adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, Holy Hours and so forth? *It is necessary to teach how to pray individually and not to collectivize prayer*. The weekly meeting of Christians with God, at Mass and in other liturgical services, should be able to offer a greater intimacy with the Lord, "because the Kingdom of God is in your midst" (Lk 17,21), just as the priest prays with the people asking God in the *Our Father*: "Your Kingdom come". If the Liturgy of the

Word is a "dialogue between God and his people", the people feel "drawn to respond to this dialogue of love by giving thanks and praise, and by demonstrating their fidelity to the task of continual "conversion' " (Apostolic Letter *Dies Domini*, n. 41). The means offered for a correct understanding of the Eucharist, the homily, catechetical preparation, Sunday Missalettes, etc., must be ready to enrich the people's celebration of this day. Otherwise, they tend to empty the sacrament and the liturgical message itself of their content. For this reason the celebration of the Eucharist cannot and must not be turned into an occasion for to demands of a political nature as is suggested by the publications put out for the country as guides for Sunday Mass.⁶ Another of the important concerns of your dioceses is *popular piety*. The necessary growth in faith and Gospel witness through the transformation of temporal realities according to the plan of God must bring the Church's faithful to an active participation in liturgical and sacramental life. In fact, the Council recalls that the liturgy is "the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; it is also the fount from which all her power flows. For the goal of apostolic endeavour is that all who are made sons of God by faith and Baptism should come together ... to take part in the sacrifice and to eat the Lord's Supper" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 10). Hence liturgical services, since they are "celebrations of the Church which is "the sacrament of unity' " (*ibid.*, n. 26), must be regulated only by the competent authority (can. 838 4) and require of everyone deep and respectful fidelity to the rites and genuine texts. An erroneous application of the value of creativity and spontaneity to the liturgical celebrations, although these are typical features of popular expressions of the life of your people, must not alter the rites and texts, nor, above all, the sense of the mystery which we celebrate in the liturgy.⁷ However, I know that your liturgical ministry coexists with the presence of many cultural groups, that are a further demonstration of the Church's catholicity. Many of these groups live alongside one another in urban areas and transform their culture in a perfect symbiosis. This phenomenon implies a particularly sensitive response which is entrusted to your own judgement and pastoral prudence.

As you know, respect for the different cultures and the corresponding inculturation of the Gospel embrace topics that deserve special attention. It is of course impossible to avoid mentioning "*African-Brazilian*" culture in the broader context of the evangelization "*ad gentes*", that is very present today in your theological and pastoral reflection. This raises the delicate question of inculturation, especially in the liturgical rites, vocabulary and forms of musical and physical expression typical of African-Brazilian culture. It is well-known that the interaction of Christianity with African customs and traditions has given the vocabulary, syntax and prosody of the Portuguese language that is spoken in Brazil its special character. The presence of the African element in the Baroque sacred art of the colonial period, which has left such beautiful architectural monuments and religious sculptures and has integrated sacred and profane music into the feasts observed by popular piety, has clearly marked the authentic cultural expressions of this multi-racial society that is Brazil. It is evident, then, that we would be moving away from the specific goal of evangelization if we were to stress one of these formative elements of Brazilian culture, or if we were to isolate it from the interactive process that is so enriching, in a way that would make it necessary to create a new liturgy for Brazilians of African descent. It would be inconceivable to give the rite an external presentation and structure - with regard to the priest's vestments, language, music, ceremonies and liturgical objects - based on the so-called African-Brazilian rites, without the rigorous application of a *serious and profound discernment about their compatibility with the revealed Truth of Jesus Christ*. It is necessary to maintain, for example, an adequate and prudent vigilance over certain rites that inspire the comparison of the august mystery of the Trinity with the pantheon of the spirits and deities of the African forms of worship, because one would run the risk of modifying the sacramental formulas in their Trinitarian structure. Moreover, one should identify and aptly correct the introduction into the sacramental rite of rites, music and objects that explicitly belong to the world of African-Brazilian worship. The Catholic Church looks at these forms of worship with interest but considers harmful the concrete relativism of practising both, or of a fusion between both as if they held equal value, thereby endangering the identity of the Catholic

faith. She feels it is her duty to assert that syncretism is harmful when it jeopardizes the truth of the Christian rite and the expression of the faith to the detriment of a genuine evangelization. The task of adaptation and inculturation is important for the future of liturgical renewal. The Conciliar Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy established norms for it (nn. 37-40) while the "Instruction on the Roman Liturgy and Inculturation" deepened this topic and clarified the procedures that must be followed by the Bishops' Conferences, in the light of canon law, after the liturgical reform (cf. *The Roman Liturgy and Inculturation, Varietates legitimae*, nn. 62 and 65-68).⁸ In your evangelizing activity, a sector that deserves your full attention as Pastors is that of the *indigenous communities*. Last year, your Bishops' Conference proposed as the theme for the Fraternity Campaign: "Brotherhood and the Indigenous Peoples". I am delighted to know that the diocesan pastoral activity of several particular Churches is making a crucial contribution to ensuring that indigenous communities become more conscious of their own identity, the values of their cultures and of their rightful place in the Brazilian population as a whole. The celebration of the Fifth Centenary of the Evangelization of Brazil also provided an opportunity to renew your dedication to the evangelization of the country's indigenous communities. The Gospel must continue to enter into the indigenous cultures and enable them to express themselves in community life, faith and liturgy. I take the occasion to reaffirm that a Church that is alive and united with her Pastors will be the best defence for undoing the disintegrating activities of certain sects that are rampant among your faithful, sowing confusion and distorting the content of the Christian message.⁹ At the end of this meeting, I would like to repeat once again, dear Brothers, my gratitude for the efforts you have made in many areas of pastoral activity, for the spirit with which you guide the people of God, for your firm will to serve men and women through the proclamation of the Gospel that saves all who believe in Jesus Christ (cf. Rom 1,16). As I encourage you to continue in your mission with renewed fervour, I ask you to take my affectionate greeting and blessing to your priests, your men and women religious and your faithful, and particularly to the sick, the elderly, and those who are suffering, for whatever reason, who always have a special place in the Pope's heart. May *Nossa Senhora Aparecida* intercede with the Lord for the holiness of all the faithful of Brazil, for the prosperity of the nation and for the well-being of each of its families! With these ardent wishes, I cordially impart to you my Apostolic Blessing.