



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE BISHOPS OF THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE
OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA AND SOLOMON ISLANDS
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA APOSTOLORUM" VISIT**

Saturday, 25 June 2005

Dear Brother Bishops,

1. In the love of our Lord I cordially welcome you, the members of the Episcopal Conference of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands, and make my own the greeting of Peter: "Grace and peace be yours in abundance" (*1 Pet* 1:2). I am grateful to Bishop Sarego for the kind sentiments he offered on your behalf. I warmly reciprocate them and assure you and those entrusted to your pastoral care of my prayers. Travelling great distances to visit the tombs of the apostles Peter and Paul you "more and more recognize and treasure that immense heritage of spiritual and moral wealth that the whole Church, joined with the Bishop of Rome ... has spread throughout the world" (*Pastor Bonus*, Appendix I, 3).

2. Jesus Christ continues to draw the peoples of your two island nations to a still deeper faith and life in him. As Bishops you respond to his voice by asking how the Church can become an even more effective instrument of Christ (cf. *Ecclesia in Oceania*, 4). The recent national "General Assembly" in Papua New Guinea and the "Seminar" in Solomon Islands have addressed this task. From these two events clear signs of hope have emerged including the keen participation of the young in the mission of the Church, the outstanding generosity of missionaries, and the flowering of local vocations. At the same time you have not hesitated to recognize the difficulties which continue to afflict your Dioceses. In the face of these, the faithful look to you to be courageous witnesses to Christ, vigilant in seeking new ways to teach the faith so that the power of the Gospel can permeate their way of thinking, standards of judgement, and norms of behaviour (cf. *Sapientia Christiana*, Foreword).

3. As you know, priests are and must be a Bishop's closest cooperators (cf. *Pastores Gregis*, 47). The particular significance of the *communio* between a Bishop and his presbyters demands that your interest in their well-being be of the utmost importance to you. This special relationship is expressed most effectively through your assiduous care to uphold the unique identity of your priests, to encourage their personal sanctification in the ministry, and to foster a deepening of their pastoral commitment. Priestly identity must never be likened to any secular title or confused with civic or political office. Rather, configured to Christ who emptied himself taking the form of a servant (cf. *Phil 2:7-8*), the priest lives a life of simplicity, chastity and humble service, which inspires others by example. At the heart of the priesthood is the daily, devout celebration of Holy Mass. In this Year of the Eucharist I appeal to your priests: be faithful to this commitment which is the centre and mission of the life of each one of you (*Message at the Missa Pro Ecclesia*, 20 April 2005, 4).

The proper formation of Priests and Religious is absolutely integral to successful evangelization (cf. *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 2). I know you have been addressing this matter with due attention for quite some time. Your concern for the human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral development of your seminarians, as well as men and women Religious in training, will bear much fruit in your Dioceses. I encourage you therefore to ensure careful selection of candidates, to supervise your seminaries personally and to provide regular programmes of ongoing formation so necessary for deepening priestly and religious identity and enriching joyful commitment to celibacy. Finally in this regard, I offer my prayers of deep gratitude for those who serve in seminaries and houses of formation. Please let them know that the Holy Father thanks them for their generosity.

4. Dear Brothers, your Catechists have embraced with great zeal the burning conviction of Saint Paul: "woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel" (*1 Cor 9:16*). During the Synod for Oceania many of you noted with satisfaction that an increasing number of the lay faithful are coming to a deeper appreciation of their duty to participate in the Church's mission of evangelization (cf. *Ecclesia in Oceania*, 19). If this zeal is to succeed in convincing an ever greater number of believers that "faith in fact has the force to shape culture itself by penetrating it to its very core" (*ibid.*, 20) then the pastoral priorities which you have identified - especially that of marriage and stable family life - will require corresponding, appropriate adult catechetical programmes. In this way, I am confident that your people will deepen their understanding of the faith, grow in their ability to express its liberating truth, and account for the hope that is in them! (cf. *1 Pet 3:15*).

5. With fraternal affection I offer these reflections wishing to affirm you in your desire to embrace the summons to testimony and evangelization which ensue from the encounter with Christ, constantly intensified and deepened in the Eucharist (cf. *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, 24). United in your proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ, go forward in hope! Invoking upon you the intercession of Blessed Peter To Rot, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing to you and the priests, Religious, and lay faithful of your Dioceses.

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