



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE BISHOPS OF THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE OF BRAZIL (CENTRE EAST REGION)
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

*Consistory Hall
Monday, 15 November 2010*

Dear Brother Bishops,

I am pleased to welcome you on the occasion of your *ad limina* visit. You have come to the City where Peter ended his mission of evangelization and bore witness to Christ even to the point of pouring out his Blood; you have come here to see and greet the Successor of Peter. In this way you strengthen the apostolic foundations of the Church in your country and visibly express your communion with all the other members of the Episcopal College and with the Roman Pontiff himself (cf. *Pastores Gregis*, n. 8). The cordial words which Archbishop João Braz of Brasília addressed to me on your behalf were in this key. I thank him, as I assure you of my cordial affection and of my prayers for all the people entrusted to your pastoral care.

The series of the Brazilian Prelates' meetings with the Pope that began more than a year ago ends with the visit of the Centre East Region. By a felicitous coincidence, the date of the Discourse I addressed to the first group of Bishops was your National Feast Day of Independence, while the last Discourse which I am delivering today is taking place on the very day on which the proclamation of the Republic in Brazil is commemorated. I make the most of the occasion to emphasize once again the importance of the Church's evangelizing action in the construction of the Brazilian identity. As you know well, today's society demands of Christians a renewed witness of life so that the proclamation of the Gospel may be accepted for what it is: the Good News of the saving action of God who goes to meet man.

In this regard, for almost 60 years the National Conference of the Bishops of Brazil has been a reference point for Brazilian society, proposing itself increasingly and primarily as a place in which

to put charity into practice. In fact, the first witness that is expected of those who proclaim the word of God is that of reciprocal charity: “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn 13:35). Your Bishops’ Conference, like the others, came into being as a practical application of the collegial affection of Bishops in hierarchical communion with the Successor of Peter to be an instrument of affective and effective communion among all the members and of efficient collaboration with the Pastor of every particular Church in the threefold function of teaching, sanctifying and governing the sheep of his own flock.

The Bishops’ Conference, therefore, is presented as one of the forms, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, which permit the Bishops to exercise jointly and harmoniously certain pastoral functions for the good of the faithful and of all the citizens of a specific territory (*cf. Code of Canon Law*, can. 447).

In fact, an ever closer and more harmonious cooperation with their Brothers in the ministry help the Bishops to carry out his mandate better (*cf. Christus Dominus*, n. 37), without abdicating from the principal responsibility of leading his particular Church as the proper, ordinary and immediate Pastor (*cf. Motu Proprio Apostolos Suos*, n. 10), making heard the voice of Jesus Christ who “is the same yesterday and today and for ever” (Heb 13:8).

The Bishops’ Conference therefore coordinates the Bishops’ efforts and intentions, becoming an instrument that enables each to share his burdens; but it must not become a parallel or substitute of the ministry of each one of the Bishops. In other words it must neither change its relationship with the respective particular Church or with the Episcopal College nor make itself an intermediary between the Bishop and the See of Peter.

At the same time, in the faithful exercise of the teaching office incumbent on you, dear Bishops, when you meet in assembly you must above all examine the most efficient means to ensure that you bring the universal Magisterium to the people entrusted to you in a satisfactory way. This teaching office will be carried out in the terms indicated by my venerable Predecessor, Pope John Paul ii, in his Motu Proprio *Apostolos Suos*, also in confronting the new issues emerging, so as to be able subsequently to direct people’s consciences in order to find the right solution to the new problems raised by the social and cultural changes.

Today certain topics in particular require a join action on the part of Bishops: the promotion and safeguard of faith and morals, the translation of the liturgical books, the promotion and formation of vocations to special consecration, the compilation of teaching aids for catechesis, ecumenical commitment, relations with the civil authorities, the protection of human life from conception until natural death, the holiness of the family and of marriage between a man and a woman, the right of parents to educate their own children, religious freedom and the other human rights, peace and social justice.

At the same time, it is necessary to recall that the consultors and structures of the Bishops' Conference exist to serve the Bishops and not to replace them. In brief, it is a question of ensuring that the Bishops' Conference, with its institutions, always function as a driving force of the pastoral solicitude of the Bishops whose chief concern must be the salvation of souls, which, moreover, is the fundamental mission of the Church.

Dear brothers, at the end of our meeting, I would like to invite you to look to the future with Christ's eyes, placing your hope in him, for "hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (Rom 5:5).

In reaffirming my deep affection for the Brazilian people, I entrust Brazil to the motherly intercession of the Virgin Mary, *Nossa Senhora Aparecida*, a model for all disciples. May she lead you on the paths of her Son. Remembering all the Brazilian Prelates who have come here on their *ad limina* visit in the past 14 months, as well as those who were prevented from coming by health problems, I warmly impart the Apostolic Blessing to you, and also to the priests, men and women religious, catechists and all the members of your dioceses.

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