



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS OF COLOMBIA ON THE "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

6 July 1979

Beloved Brothers in the Episcopate,

I receive you today with deep joy, Pastors of the four Ecclesiastical Provinces of Nueva Pamplona, Barranquilla, Cartagena and Bucaramanga, who have come to Rome for your visit "ad limina Apostolorum." Welcome, in Christ's name.

You form the first group of Bishops of Colombia who will come to the Eternal City this year to meet Peter and inform him of the achievements, hopes and difficulties of each one of their respective particular Churches.

Allow me in the first place to express my sincere appreciation and gratitude for the eloquent words uttered, on behalf of you all, by Archbishop Mario Revollo of Nueva Pamplona, President of the Colombian Episcopal Conference. They show clearly the central aim of the visit "ad limina": to bear witness to and consolidate this close union of sentiments and intentions of the Bishops with the Successor of Peter and Pastor of the whole Church: the guarantee of the necessary ecclesial union.

But this movement of ecclesial faith and love is not confined to us gathered here. Through that admirable and mysterious bond in the Mystical Body of Christ, we feel the presence of your priests, men and women religious, and faithful. They are the object of our common care; and this has been revealed both in the individual talks with each one of you and at this collective meeting.

Take to each one of the members of your flock my most cordial greeting in love of Christ, my encouragement to persevere in the firmness of faith, my exhortation not to fail in hope, and my prayer to grow strong in the bond of brotherly love. May the grace of the Spirit and the constant

prayer of the Pope sustain them in their work and in their daily pilgrimage, so that they may be living witnesses to the resurrection of Christ and generous builders of the Kingdom of God in their respective fields of activity.

Among the multiple cares that concern your souls as Pastors, I know there is one that has a preeminent place: the problem of priestly and religious vocations. This is, in fact, a very important subject for the whole Church, for Colombia, and in particular for your four Ecclesiastical Provinces. I wish to confide in you that this is one of the points to which the Pope devotes special attention, in view of the enormous repercussion it has on the general progress of the Church, for the present and for the future.

Convinced of that, I wish to give you as your personal charge what I indicated in my opening address at the Puebla Conference: that you put care for vocations among your priority pastoral tasks. It is something vital, indispensable; since a Church that lacks qualified, stable agents, completely dedicated to this ministry, could not effectively carry out the work of evangelization.

It is certain that all the members of the ecclesial community, including laity—whose help must be appreciated and expanded in every possible way—must take part, by virtue of their Christian vocation, in the evangelizing task of the Church. But they cannot replace the indispensable presence of the consecrated minister or of the soul called to specific ecclesial dedication. What is more, the real maturity of the Catholic laity cannot help being reflected also in a practical opening to fully consecrated life.

In your concern for vocations you must aim in three directions: diligent search for these vocations, adequate preparation of them, and care for their perseverance. It will be opportune for this purpose to set up a well-prepared vocational apostolate which will pay careful attention to the family, the school, youth, apostolic movements; vital centres in which, if they are saturated with faith and good morals, there germinate so many decisions of commitment to the service of God and one's neighbour.

Do not, therefore, consider it superfluous or less productive on the apostolic plane to dedicate to this work well-qualified priests of great spirit, who attend preferably to this sector, in the framework of some good diocesan and even national plans to which I know you give careful attention. And, in that, interest all priests, men and women religious, and committed laity.

You should give no less care to seminaries and houses of religious formation which—as indicated on various occasions, also recently, by the Holy See—must always be a centre for the preparation of well-balanced human personalities, with all the healthy opening that the present moment requires, with a solid spiritual, moral, and intellectual basis, capable of disciplined life and the spirit of sacrifice. Without that, the interior structure of a vocation for the Church and the world of today, cannot be constructed. A fundamental premise must never be forgotten: if we present debased

values, the young people themselves are the first to reject them, since they do not discover in them a framework in which to pour all their generosity and longing for dedication.

Do not fail either to give due care to the apostolate of adult vocations, which in certain environments and also in Colombia are a more and more frequent and promising phenomenon.

Finally, take to heart diligently the perseverance of those who are already living complete consecration. Do not fear to spend your time and best energies in this task. In the line indicated in my recent Letter to the Bishops, on the occasion of Holy Thursday, above all, be real friends and supporters, with your word and your luminous example, of priests and consecrated souls. May your life and effort be a precious help, in the spirit of brotherly service, to maintain in them clear awareness of their own identity as the chosen.

Beloved Brothers: here are some guidelines for you, to be completed with your zeal and creativity as Pastors.

Let my last word be a brotherly call to hope and to prayer to the Lord of the harvest, not to abandon us. May he make your efforts fruitful. May Mary, our Mother, accompany you always. As my prayer for you and for each member of your ecclesial communities accompanies you, while I bless you all with special affection.

Copyright 1979 © Libreria Editrice Vaticana