



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS OF URUGUAY
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Thursday, 6 September 2001

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

1. I welcome you with great affection on the occasion of your visit *ad limina Apostolorum*. With this visit, as Pastors of the pilgrim Church in Uruguay you would like to renew communion with the Successor of Peter and as apostles to share the causes of joy and hope, of grief and anguish lived by the beloved part of the People of God entrusted to your pastoral care.

2. I would like first of all to express my deep gratitude to Bishop Carlos Maria Collazzi Irazábal of Mercedes, President of your Bishops' Conference, for his affectionate words on behalf of you all. He also spoke of your country's situation and the action of the Church which encourages the life of the faithful and their progress in faith at the beginning of the third millennium.

I treasure grateful memories of the national pilgrimage which you and a large number of Uruguayan Catholics made to Rome last year as "a privileged moment of the Great Jubilee". That Jubilee meeting also coincided with the anniversary of the death of "Bishop Jacinto Vera, the first Bishop of Uruguay, who was able, not without difficulties, to make the Church present in every corner of the country" (*Address*, 12 June 2000).

You developed the great heritage of this Jubilee in your collective document *Orientaciones Pastorales 2001-2006* (Pastoral Guidelines 2001-2006) basing it on "the contemplation of the face of Christ: Christ considered in his historical features and in his mystery, Christ known through his manifold presence in the Church and in the world, and confessed as the meaning of history and the light of life's journey" (*Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 15). With this document, you wish to point out a goal towards which everyone should move: holiness.

3. In exercising your episcopal ministry, as Teachers of the faith, you face different pastoral priorities, faithfully following the teachings of the Second Vatican Council in which "we find a sure compass by which to take our bearings in the century now beginning" (*ibid.*, n. 57). Mindful of the current requirements of the new evangelization, Christ himself and his mission must be presented above all in a soteriological perspective.

In the metropolitan cathedral of Montevideo, during my first visit to Uruguay, I said "Lord ... we must proclaim without any fear the complete and authentic truth about you, about the Church you founded, about man and about the world which you redeemed with your blood, without reductionism or ambiguities" (*Address*, 31 March 1987, n. 3). In fact, it is not enough to promote "'values of the Kingdom', such as peace, justice, freedom, brotherhood" (*Redemptoris missio*, n. 17), but it is necessary to proclaim that "Christ is the one mediator between God and Mankind.... Christ's one, universal mediation,... is the way established by God himself" (*ibid.*, n. 5).

The mystery of Christ, as well as being the central element of our proclamation, helps to make the mystery of man truly become clear (cf. *Gaudium et spes*, n. 22). Witness and proclamation are therefore complementary realities which are deeply linked together and, as a programme for evangelization, must point to "Christ himself, who is to be known, loved and imitated, so that in him we may live the life of the Trinity, and with him transform history until its fulfilment in the heavenly Jerusalem" (*Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 29). Evangelization "is the primary service which the Church can render to every individual and to all humanity in the modern world, a world which has experienced marvellous achievements but which seems to have lost its sense of ultimate realities" (*Redemptoris missio*, n. 2).

4. Another important event in your ecclesial life was the celebration, in Colonia del Sacramento of the *Fourth National Eucharistic Congress* on the theme "Jesus Christ, fullness of life for Uruguay". It was a special moment of grace which must continue to encourage the Catholic faithful to live the mystery of the Eucharist more intensely, taking an active part in Sunday Mass and receiving Holy Communion with the proper conditions. This will help them to be more generously committed to the service of their brothers and sisters, especially the neediest.

This sacrament must be given its "full magnitude and its essential meaning. It is at one and the same time Sacrifice-Sacrament, Communion-Sacrament, Presence-Sacrament. And, although it is true that the Eucharist was always and must continue to be the most profound revelation of the human brotherhood of Christ's disciples and confessors, it cannot be treated merely as an 'occasion' for manifesting this brotherhood. When celebrating the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of the Lord, the full magnitude of the divine mystery must be respected, as must the full meaning of this sacramental sign" (*Redemptoris missio*, n. 20).

5. I want to praise the foundation of the "Bishop Mariano Soler" Faculty of Theology of Uruguay in

the Archdiocese of Montevideo, along with the work of the Centre for Pastoral Theology and the Three-Year Theology Programme for Lay People which will expand theological studies and Catholic culture. These centres are dedicated not only to forming future priests, but also offer philosophical and theological training to men and women religious and to the laity.

In this way Uruguayan culture can be enriched with the methodology of the first evangelization, which did not change the Christian message in the face of difficulties and the hostility of the world to which it was addressed, but with words and witness managed to direct and facilitate even a change of the culture. The evangelization of culture also demands that "whatever good is found sown in the minds and hearts of men or in the rites and customs of peoples, these not only are preserved from destruction, but are purified, raised up, and perfected for the glory of God ... and the happiness of man" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 17).

In fulfilling this mission, the Church in Uruguay, through her presence for almost five centuries, has made a great contribution to building the country. Indeed, Christians have collaborated in many sectors of national life. Those who built the new nation and those who put the country's culture on a firm footing, were formed in the Catholic cultural milieu. This shows us how Catholic institutions, from schools to universities, are vital for the evangelization of culture.

In her evangelizing action, the Church cannot neglect the means of social communication, if she is to reach out to people today, especially all the children and young people, in satisfactory language that faithfully transmits the Gospel message. "Then it is the daring, both humble and serene, which inspires the Christian presence in the public dialogue of the media" (*Message for the 23rd World Day of Social Communications*, 7 May 1989, n. 5).

6. Through you I would also like to greet with great affection and in a spirit of communion all the priests of your particular Churches. In an immediate way, through preaching and sacramental life, they direct the ecclesial communities that are part of diocesan reality. To each one you must dedicate the same attention and care that Jesus gave his apostles.

At the same time, bearing in mind that their intellectual preparation does not end with the seminary, you must guide them and offer them every kind of help, including continuing formation, as "a process of continual conversion" (*Pastores dabo vobis*, n. 70) which embraces the priest's human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral dimensions. In this way they will be able to give the People of God satisfactory guidance, especially when examples of life and conduct which lead to confusion and the relativism of the doctrinal and moral principles are being slyly introduced, as you highlighted in your *Orientaciones Pastorales*.

All priests who are members of institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life and work in the dioceses belong to the diocesan presbyterate. They must live out their own charisms in unity, in communion and in the mission of the particular Church. This spirit of communion between

the bishop and all his priests must be fostered, so that they may be for the faithful examples of the unity desired by Christ (cf. *Jn* 17,21). At the same time, pastoral activity will be enriched by fraternal sharing of the different charisms.

7. Concerned by the small number of persons who devote themselves to the mission, you are doing what you can to promote and attentively supervise vocations promotion, which must be accompanied primarily by prayer (cf. *Mt* 9,38). Candidates must be directed wisely and competently, so that they can go through all the necessary stages for following the Lord in the priestly or religious life.

Therefore in this regard "the Church of the Third Millennium will need to encourage all the baptized and confirmed to be aware of their active responsibility in the Church's life. Together with the ordained ministry, other ministries, whether formally instituted or simply recognized, can flourish for the good of the whole community, sustaining it in all its many needs, from catechesis to liturgy, from the education of the young to the widest array of charitable works" (*Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 46).

Everyone must feel called to collaborate in the effort to promote vocations to the priesthood and to the life of special consecration, even in sectors that are not favourable, or rife with religious indifference. "There is a pressing need to implement an extensive plan of vocational promotion, based on personal contact and involving parishes, schools and families in the effort to foster a more attentive reflection on life's essential values. These reach their fulfilment in the response which each person is invited to give to God's call, particularly when the call implies a total giving of self and of one's energies to the cause of the Kingdom" (*ibid.*).

8. Among your pastoral priorities you also feel a pressing need to help parents to be good pastors of the "domestic church". Indeed, when a family takes part in the Church's life and mission, not only does it become a sacrament of salvation for its members, but it also totally fulfils "its mission to guard, reveal and communicate love and life" (*Familiaris consortio*, n. 17).

In the *Orientaciones Pastorales* you also stressed that there is in the contemporary world a widespread deterioration of the natural and religious sense of marriage, with disturbing consequences in both the private and public domains. For this reason special attention should be paid to all families: not only to those that fulfil their mission at the service of life from conception to its natural end, founded on conjugal and family love. Pastoral discernment must also be exercised about the alternative types of union affecting the institution of the family in Uruguay today, especially those that regard mere *de facto* unions making them equivalent to real families, ignoring the authentic concept of conjugal love.

On this aspect you said that "all laws which would do harm to the family, striking at its unity and its indissolubility, or which would give legal validity to a union between persons, including those of the

same sex, who demand the same rights as the family founded upon marriage between a man and a woman,... are not laws in harmony with the divine plan" (*Address to government leaders, members of parliament and politicians*, 4 November, 2000, n. 4).

9. Confronted by serious and widespread social problems, the Church tries to respond and to find practical solutions in line with her social teaching. Through her social ministry she endeavours to spread the culture of solidarity, safeguarding her preferential option for the poor by showing active, practical love for each human being, who is faced with the temptation of indifference or surrender to circumstance. This is a context which "without ever yielding to the temptation to turn Christian communities into mere social agencies" (*Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 52), is a crucial feature of Christian life, the ecclesial approach and pastoral planning.

I know that the Church in Uruguay, despite limited material resources, is in the front line in attending to people and families who live in conditions far below the minimum standard required by human dignity and in the fight against "the new forms of poverty". The Church, through priests, men and women religious, consecrated people and committed laity, makes herself present in the marginalized neighbourhoods of cities and rural areas, through schools and many forms of assistance to the poorest and neediest.

10. At the end of this fraternal meeting, I ask you to invite the priests and deacons, men and women religious, seminarians and committed lay people to "put out into the deep" in their service to the Church and to the Uruguayan people, steadfast and faithful to Christ and to their brethren.

I entrust all that we have discussed during these days to the motherly protection of Our Lady of the Thirty Three, Mother of the Oriental People. Let yourselves be guided by Mary, Star of Evangelization, who always points out the safe path. At the same time and as an expression of my deep affection in the Lord, I impart my Apostolic Blessing to you, extending it to each and every one of your beloved diocesan faithful.