



The Holy See

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

Tuesday, 2 July 2002

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

1. I am pleased to welcome you to our meeting, Pastors of Christ's Church in Peru, who are making your *ad limina* visit to the See of Peter, the Apostle who received the mandate to "*strengthen his brethren in the faith*" (cf. Lk 22,32) and crowned his witness of love and faithfulness to the Lord by pouring out his blood for him in Rome.

I am grateful for the kind words addressed to me by Bishop Luis Armando Bambarén Gastelumendi of Chimbote, President of the Bishops' Conference, in which he identified the "*bond of unity, charity and peace*" which unite you to the Bishop of Rome (*Lumen gentium*, n. 22), as well as the principal aspirations that motivate your apostolic mission in the different particular Churches entrusted to you. As Pastor of the universal Church, I share in your anxieties, and encourage you to persevere in your devotion with generosity in an open spirit, giving an incentive to the gripping task of pastoral renewal at the beginning of the new millennium.

2. One of the crucial challenges of our time, as I pointed out in my Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio ineunte*, is precisely to make a spirituality of communion prevail in the Church and guide all the dimensions and sectors of pastoral action (cf. nn. 43-45). Indeed, communion as a spirituality that is rooted in the Trinity, as an educational principle and a Christian attitude that we must witness to openly, as well as being an imperative of Christ's Message (cf. *Ecclesia in America*, n. 33), is also a response to the "world's deepest yearnings" (*Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 43).

Through your broad pastoral experience, you are certainly familiar with the paradox of a historical moment in which the almost unlimited scope for contact and exchange frequently goes hand in

hand with a sense of isolation that causes fragmentation and conflict in various human contexts. In confronting this situation, the Church must remember and continually revive the incomparable experience of Pentecost, when *"all together the disciples praised God in all the languages, since the Spirit had led the distant peoples to unity and offered to the Father the first-fruits of all the nations"* (St Irenaeus, *Adv. Haeres*, 3,17,2). Then, Brothers in the Episcopate, you are called to be an example of communion in collegial affection, without jeopardizing the responsibility that each one has in his own local Church, which in turn *"is the perpetual and visible source and foundation of unity"* (*Lumen gentium*, n. 23).

3. Should the scarcity of means, misunderstandings, differences of opinion or of origin among your people, or any other difficulties discourage them, Jesus never fails to bring comfort by showing us that *"even winds and sea obey him"* (Mt 8,27). It is therefore necessary to rely on him and to increase in all believers a true desire for holiness, to which we are all called and in which the human being's deepest aspirations are fulfilled.

Peru, which has been blessed by God with abundant fruits of holiness, has many examples which can illumine the generations of today and unfold great prospects before them. Among others, figures such as St Toribio de Mogrovejo, St Rose of Lima, St Martín of Porres, St Francis Solano or St Juan Macías should not be forgotten. They are examples for Pastors, who must identify with Jesus Christ's personal approach that consists of simplicity, poverty, closeness, the renunciation of personal benefits and complete trust in the strength of the Spirit over and above any human means (cf. *Ecclesia in America*, n. 28). They are also models for believers, who find in the saints a living proof of the marvels God works in well-disposed hearts, whatever the social class or walk of life in which they receive his grace.

Your nation must indeed feel favoured by its many fruits of holiness, for they reveal very clearly your people's deep Christian roots, which have made a decisive contribution to forging its identity. Far from being disregarded they must be safeguarded as an indispensable value.

4. In this context it is particularly important to kindle in young people a passion for the great ideals of the Gospel, in such a way that more and more of them feel drawn to dedicating their whole life to proclaiming and witnessing that *"where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom"* (2 Cor 3,17). In this way, the evangelization of the new generations must be accompanied spontaneously by a vocations ministry, every day more urgently needed, which will unfold new horizons of hope in the local Churches.

Painstaking attention to the formation imparted in seminaries is equally important. In addition to fostering the candidate's human maturity, so that he may make himself completely available to God and the Church with full awareness and responsibility, each one must be wisely guided towards a profound spiritual life that will prepare him effectively and affectively to take on his demanding future ministry. The prerequisites of unconditionally following Jesus in the ministerial

priesthood or in the consecrated life must be clearly presented and addressed in full, so that those who truly love him may repeat in their hearts in the face of any difficulty Peter's words: "*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life*" (Jn 6,68).

Your country needs priests and evangelizers who are holy, learned and faithful to their vocation. This requirement cannot be foregone, merely because their numbers are few or because of other social or cultural circumstances. In this task the bishop must show special closeness as the father and teacher of his seminarians, relying on the unconditional and transparent cooperation of the formation teachers. An emphasis should also be placed on the spirit of collaboration among the different dioceses, so that they can offer better personal and material means to their candidates to the priesthood. This collaboration can have excellent results and shows concrete solidarity with the particular Churches in the most precarious financial position.

5. You also expressed your concern about the problems affecting marriage and the family which are due to certain cultural trends and to a specific atmosphere, at times in "militant" opposition to the authentic meaning of these institutions (cf. *Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 47). In this regard, it is important that human life and family coexistence are also motivated by the Christian project of holiness, since God's plan for all human beings and their sublime dignity as a sign of the love that unites Christ with his Church (cf. Eph 5,32) must be fully respected.

The complexity of the aspects involved in this area also require a multi-disciplinary pastoral action, in which the Pastors' catechetical project is integrated with the educational action of other lay faithful, the reciprocal help among families and the promotion of conditions favourable to the growth of the spouses' love and the family's stability. Indeed, it is indispensable that young people know the true beauty of love, "*for love is of God*" (1 Jn 4,8), so that they develop an attitude of self-giving and not selfishness, that they begin their coexistence with a clear, pure spirit in which they retain the treasure of the experience of shared faith. They must also face their future as a true vocation to which God is calling them in order to collaborate with the ineffable task of giving life.

The pastoral care of families must also consider those aspects which can condition the dignified development of the duties that belong to this fundamental institution. It must encourage greater financial support of new families being formed, greater opportunities to obtain decent housing that will prevent the deterioration of the family, and the effective possibility of exercising the right to bring up children in accordance with the family's faith and with an ethical sense of life. This means Pastors must make their voices heard to highlight the importance of the family as the first and fundamental cell of society and its irreplaceable contribution to the common good of all citizens.

This becomes especially urgent when, for more or less opportunist reasons, contraceptive policies are presented, the desire for marital fidelity stifled and the normal development of family life otherwise impeded.

6. I am pleased to see the strength and creativity of the action for the needy of the Church in Peru. It is even more necessary at a time when the difficult economic situation in this region is giving rise to many forms of poverty, old and new, and an increase in violence. When so many of God's children are living in subhuman conditions, an impetus must be given to pastoral care, involving tangible and organized social assistance, that will satisfy the most urgent needs and lay the foundations of a harmonious and lasting development based on the spirit of fraternal solidarity.

In this regard, I express my deepest gratitude to the numerous ecclesial institutions that with great energy and dedication take the light of the Gospel and fraternal help to the most remote corners of Peru, from the forests of the Amazon, to the Cordilleras of the Andes and the coastal plains. It is wonderful to see how, in this area, when efforts are combined, differences vanish and boundaries are overcome. The institutes of consecrated life are distinguishing themselves in this. They can be considered "*a living exegesis of Jesus' words: "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me"*" (*Vita consecrata*, n. 82). It is up to Pastors to make all these projects a clear sign of the Church's concern that none of her members, Pastors or faithful, should be unmoved by spiritual and material need, whether this regards daily support, personal dignity or the effective opportunity to participate in the common good of their people.

7. At the end of this fraternal meeting, I repeat my encouragement to you to persevere in your work of guiding and enlightening the life of your particular Churches, which I entrust to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Star of the New Evangelization. Please take the Pope's greetings and affection back to your priests and seminarians, the missionaries, religious communities, catechists, teachers and committed lay people, as well as to the elderly and the sick, who are beside you and help you in the exciting task of sowing the Gospel in Peruvian hearts which are a fountain of hope and peace.

As I accompany you with my prayers and affection, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing to you all.