



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC **MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II**
TO THE BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF SLOVAKIA

Banská Bystrica – Diocesan Seminary
Friday, 12 September 2003

To the Venerable Pastors
of the Church in Slovakia

1. It is with deep joy that I take part with you, dear Brothers in the Episcopate, in this moment of shared fraternity, which calls to mind the Apostles gathered around Jesus to restore themselves in a salutary pause between the labour of preaching and the apostolate (cf. *Mk 6:30-32*).

“Ecce quam bonum et quam iucundum habitare fratres in unum!” (*Psalms 133,1*). I greet you all and I embrace you in the Lord, and I renew the appreciation and the gratitude of the Church for the zeal that you show as you shepherd the faithful that have been entrusted to you (cf. *1 Pt. 5:2-3*).

I join wholeheartedly with you in your thanksgiving to the Lord as you celebrate the tenth anniversary of the establishment of your Episcopal Conference.

2. The Church of God in Slovakia, after the dark days of persecution and silence, during which it offered a shining witness of faithfulness to the Gospel, has been able in these last years to take up again its activities and to provide itself with those structures that are necessary for the free exercise of its mission.

I remember with pleasure, among other things, the general basic Agreement signed with the Slovak Republic in the year 2000, the work of the mixed commissions in preparation for other partial agreements, the establishment of the Military Ordinariate, the opening of the Catholic

University at Ruomberok and the strengthening of the transmissions of *Radio Lumen*.

3. Together with the fore-mentioned actions, you are committed overall to the *renewal of Christian life at different levels*. The results we are seeing are comforting. Many people have rediscovered the evangelic courage to declare openly their Catholic Faith, as is seen from the 2001 census. The apostolic work – carried out under your guidance by so many zealous priests, religious men and women, and committed laypeople – is bearing fruits. Let us bless together the Name of the Lord!

I exhort you to continue courageously along the path you have begun. Human and spiritual formation, together with an adequate cultural preparation, must be the object of special concern in *seminaries* and *religious houses* so as to offer to the Church and to the world priests and consecrated persons who can be humble and ardent apostles of the Gospel. By praying to the “Lord of the harvest”, by arousing the sensibility of consciences, by wise pastoral action, the urgent task of promoting a *new flowering of priestly and religious vocations* is to be undertaken. In fact, the future of the Church in Slovakia depends on this.

Moreover, venerable Brothers, rely with confidence and wisdom on the cooperation of *laypeople* committed to imbuing temporal realities with Christian values. Be very attentive to *the family*, temple of love and life. Proclaim and defend the unity and indissolubility of marriage. Look with love on *young people* who are the present and future of the Church and society. Cultivate an open dialogue *with the world of culture*, sustained by the conviction that “faith and reason mutually support each other; each influences the other, as they offer to each other a purifying critique and a stimulus to pursue the search for deeper understanding” (*Fides et Ratio*, 100).

4. Take care of the *weak* and the *poor*, in whom Christ asks to be recognised (cf. *Mt 25:40*). With pastoral solicitude, be close to *the unemployed*. Take upon yourselves their difficult situation and encourage all areas of society to seek possible ways *to create new jobs*, where young people above all may find opportunities suited to their capacity, often enhanced by years of theoretical and practical preparation.

You are well aware how much *human promotion* serves *evangelisation* which is always the primary commitment of the Church. In this regard, I am pleased to point out that the celebration of *Diocesan Synods*, already convoked in the Dioceses of Banská Bystrica and Košice, will be a useful instrument for renewing and developing pastoral action and the proclamation of the Good News to the men and women of our times.

5. The Pope knows, venerable Brothers, that the Episcopal ministry brings with it thorns and crosses, that often remain hidden in the secret of the heart. But he also knows, as do you, that in the mysterious design of Providence, these sufferings are the guarantee of fruitfulness of an apostolate that, with God’s help, will produce abundant results.

Do not become discouraged. Do not let yourselves be overcome by difficulties and fatigue. Rely always on the support of God's grace, which works wonders even through our weakness (cf. *2 Cor* 12:9).

As a final thought for our meeting, dear Brothers, I am pleased to read with you what is stated in the concluding part of the Directory on the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops: "since he is the visible dynamic unitive centre of the particular Church, the Bishop stands first in rank, to serve God and God's holy people. His entire authority, all his offices – if they are understood and exercised according to the Gospel – are an outstanding and continual service, that most perfect charity, which would make him ready even to give his life for his brothers. Especially in the case of a Bishop does presiding mean being useful and overseeing mean to serve; while to govern is to love and honour becomes a burden".

May the Virgin Mary, venerated in this country as *the Sorrowful Mother of the Lord*, guard you all in her maternal heart and obtain for all the abundance of divine graces.

To you and to your communities, I impart my affectionate Blessing.

Banská Bystrica, 12 September 2003.

JOHN PAUL II