



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS TAKING PART IN THE COURSE
OF FORMATION ORGANIZED BY THE
CONGREGATION FOR THE EVANGELIZATION OF PEOPLES**

Friday, 19 September 2003

Dear Brothers in the Episcopacy!

1. I am pleased to meet you on the occasion of this course of formation organized by the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. I thank you for your visit. I greet each one of you, and through you I wish to embrace the entire Christian People entrusted to your care by Divine Providence, especially the priests, the men and women religious, the catechists and the laypeople actively engaged in spreading the Gospel. I offer a special word of greeting to Cardinal Crescenzo Sepe, Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. I thank him for the words addressed to me and for the zeal with which he, together with all his co-workers, is dedicated to the cause of the *missio ad gentes*.

2. Dear and venerable Brother Bishops! By means of your generous dedication, you make the presence of Christ in the world bear fruit and you enrich the various activities of his Church. Your participation in this unique phase of formation, promoted by the Dicastery of *Propaganda Fide*, constitutes a further sign of how much you desire to foster missionary activity throughout the earth. This is still an urgent apostolic undertaking in our day, and you are called to be its courageous and tireless supporters in the midst of daily difficulties and trials. As I observed in my Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio*, in their ministry Bishops are responsible for the evangelization of the world, both as members of the Episcopal College and as Pastors of particular Churches (cf. No. 63). The proclamation of the Gospel in every part of the globe belongs to Pastors, who have been consecrated not just for a Diocese but for the salvation of all the world (cf. *ibid.*). "I sense that the moment has come", I wrote in that Encyclical, "to commit all of the Church's energies to a new evangelization and to the mission *ad gentes*. No believer in Christ, no institution of the Church, can avoid this supreme duty: to proclaim Christ to all peoples" (*Redemptoris Missio*, 3). The whole Church therefore, in her different parts, is urged to spread the Gospel to the most distant regions

of every continent.

3. For you also, dear and venerable Brothers, the call of Jesus resounds forcefully: "*Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation*" (Mk 16:15).

Among your duties is that of transmitting the gift of faith and encouraging your communities to be evangelizers. There is room for everyone in the Lord's vineyard. No one is so poor that he has nothing to give; no one so rich that he has nothing to receive.

May your soul hear every day the echo of the Redeemer's exhortation: "*Duc in altum!*" This is an invitation to cast "spiritual nets" into the sea of the world. In turn, those who trust in the Divine Master experience the wonder of the miraculous catch of fish. This is the promise of Jesus, who does not disappoint those who place their trust in him, like Saint Paul and so many saints who in these millennia have made the Church glorious.

Yes, it is true! "God is preparing a great springtime for Christianity, and we can already see its first signs" (*Redemptoris Missio*, 86). Therefore be trustful and look with confidence to the future in every circumstance. The Lord – as he himself has assured us – remains always with us.

4. Be holy! On different occasions I have noted that holiness is the urgent pastoral need of our times. It is an pressing requirement first of all for those whom God has called to serve him more closely. Indeed, in order to be vigilant guardians of the Lord's flock, in order to protect it from all kinds of dangers, in order to feed it with the food of the word and the Eucharist, Pastors themselves must be nourished by intense and constant prayer and must cultivate a deep intimacy with Christ. Only in this way will they become, for priests and for the faithful, examples of fidelity and witnesses of an apostolic zeal enlightened by the Holy Spirit.

Support and development of every apostolic undertaking is found in communion with God. Hence, you, dear and venerable Brothers, must be the first to strengthen your interior life by drawing from the fountain of divine grace, mindful always of the biblical image of Moses praying on the mountain: "Whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed" (Ex 17:11).

5. No activity, no matter how important, should distract you from this spiritual priority that sets the tone for the apostolic mandate received with episcopal ordination. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, makes you his associates in serving the Christian people as fathers, teachers and pastors. Accompany the unceasing proclamation of the faith with coherent and joyful witness to the Gospel, for "it is primarily by her conduct and by her life that the Church will evangelize the world, in other words by her living witness of fidelity to the Lord Jesus – the witness of poverty and detachment, of freedom in the face of the powers of this world, in short, the witness of sanctity" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 41).

In your communities there are living memories of saints, martyrs, confessors of the faith, courageous preachers of the message of salvation, persons who by their very lives more so than by their words made the love of Christ visible and, we could even say, almost physically tangible. Follow in their footsteps! Be pastors who, by their example more than by their words, honour the Gospel and inspire in those around them the desire to know it better and to put it into practice.

May the Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen of the Missions, protect you. I assure you of a daily remembrance in my prayers and I cordially bless you, together with your communities.