



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE BISHOPS OF HONDURAS
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Thursday, 26 June 2008

*Your Eminence,
Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,*

I receive you with great joy this morning and I am grateful to the Lord to have been able to meet you in order to share all the projects and hopes, worries and difficulties in your hearts as Pastors of the Church. The Catholic Community of Honduras has been blessed with the recent ordination of five new Bishops; may the Lord grant that this *ad limina* visit, taking place during the celebration of the 25th anniversary of [Pope John Paul II's Pastoral Visit to your Country](#), contribute to strengthening further the close bonds of communion between you and the Successor of Peter so that with fresh zeal you may take up the mission the Lord has entrusted to you.

I would like to thank warmly Cardinal Oscar Andrés Rodríguez Maradiaga, Archbishop of Tegucigalpa and President of your Bishops' Conference for his kind words to me expressing your affection and loyalty, as well as that of your priests, religious and diocesan faithful. I keep them all, especially those who are suffering because of poverty, violence or sickness, ever present in my prayers and express to all my esteem and spiritual closeness.

The People of Honduras are characterized by their profound religious spirit which is expressed in the numerous and deep-rooted practices of popular piety which, duly purified of elements foreign to the faith, must be an effective instrument for the announcement of the Gospel. On the other hand, as is happening in other places, the spread of secularism and the proselytism of the sects are a source of confusion for many of the faithful and, in addition, give rise to a loss of the feeling of membership in the Church.

Far from leading to discouragement, the awareness of the enormous difficulties that stand in the

way of your pastoral mission must serve as a vehicle for an extensive and bold evangelizing drive which relies not on the effectiveness of material means or human projects but rather relies on the power of the Word of God (cf. Heb 4: 12), accepted with faith, lived with humility and proclaimed with fidelity.

As successors of the Apostles, you have been called to a sublime mission: "to perpetuate the work of Christ, the eternal Pastor" (*Christus Dominus*, n. 2). Christ is certainly the heart of evangelization (cf. *Pastores Gregis*, n. 27) and this is why love for him as well as for men and women urges you to bring his message to the most remote corners of your beloved Nation so that everyone can arrive at this personal and intimate encounter with the Lord, which is the beginning of a genuine Christian life (cf. *Deus Caritas Est*, n. 1).

In this urgent task of proclaiming the Good News of salvation, you rely on the invaluable help of your priests. As the first collaborators in your pastoral mission, they must be the first to whom you - as fathers, brothers and friends - show your concern, with attention to their spiritual life and material needs. Likewise, the care and attention with which you follow the seminarians' formation is an eloquent expression of your love for the priesthood. With trust in the Lord and with generosity, always make available to the Seminary the best formation teachers and the appropriate material means, so that these future priests may acquire the human, spiritual and priestly maturity that the faithful need and have a right to expect from their pastors.

Despite the increase in vocations in recent times, the scarcity of priests in your particular Churches is rightly one of your main concerns. Therefore, the commitment to inspiring vocations among youth should be a primary goal of your pastoral programmes and must involve all the diocesan and parish communities. In this regard, I urge you to encourage private and community prayer which, in addition to being an order of the Lord (cf. Mt 9: 38), is necessary so as to discover and nurture a generous response to their vocation. I cannot fail to recognize the great work of evangelization that the religious communities carry out, enriching your Dioceses with the presence of specific charisms and whose collaboration you must continue to promote in a spirit of true ecclesial communion.

I would also like to point out the important role that the lay Catholics of Honduras are taking on in parishes as catechists and delegates of the Word. One important aspect of the pastoral ministry consists in working tirelessly to make the faithful increasingly aware that, by virtue of their Baptism and confirmation, they are called to live the fullness of charity by taking part in the Church's saving mission (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 33). By their witness to Christian life, they can bring to every social class the light of Christ's message, attracting to the ecclesial community those whose faith has faltered or who are distant from it. Therefore, the lay faithful need to intensify their relationship with God and to acquire a sound formation, especially with regard to the Church's social teaching. In this way, like the leaven in the dough, they will be able to carry out their mission to transform society according to God's wishes (cf. *ibid.*, n. 31).

Likewise, a context that requires special pastoral attention is that of marriage and the family, whose solidity and stability so greatly benefit both the Church and society. In this respect, it is right to recognize the important step taken to include in your Country's Constitution an explicit recognition of marriage. Yet, you know well that possessing a good legislation does not suffice without the cultural work and catechesis required to illuminate the truth and beauty of marriage, a true perpetual covenant of life and love between a man and a woman.

Like the proclamation of the Word and the celebration of the sacraments, the service of charity is an essential part of the Church's mission (cf. *Deus Caritas Est*, n. 25). Hence Bishops, as successors of the Apostles, should be primarily responsible for this service of charity in the particular Churches (cf. *ibid.*, n. 32). I know well your concern for the poverty in which so many of your compatriots live, as well as the increase in violence, emigration, the destruction of the environment, corruption and the gaps in education, among other serious problems. As ministers of the Good Shepherd you have carried out, with words and actions, an intense work of assistance for the needy. I warmly urge you to reveal God's merciful face in your ministry, strengthening in all your diocesan and parish communities a widespread and far-reaching service of charity, which reaches in particular the sick, the elderly and prisoners.

Dear brothers, I reaffirm to you my affection and my gratitude for all your dedication and pastoral solicitude. At the same time, I ask you to convey to your priests, religious, seminarians and lay faithful, the Pope's greeting and appreciation.

I entrust to the Immaculate Virgin of Suyapa you, your intentions and your pastoral proposals so that you may bring back to all the children of Honduras the hope that never disappoints, Jesus Christ, the one Saviour of the human race. With these hopes, I accompany you with my prayers and my Apostolic Blessing.

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