



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO MEXICO AND THE REPUBLIC OF CUBA
(MARCH 23-29, 2012)

**CELEBRATION OF VESPERS
WITH THE BISHOPS OF MEXICO AND LATIN AMERICA**

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

*Cathedral of Our Lady of Light, León
Sunday, 25 March 2012*

[Video]

*Your Eminences,
Dear Brother Bishops,*

It gives me great joy to be able to pray with all of you in this Basilica-Cathedral of León, dedicated to our Lady of Light. In the lovely painting venerated in this basilica, the Blessed Virgin holds her Son in one hand with immense tenderness while extending her other hand to succour sinners. This is how the Church in every age sees Mary. We praise her for giving us the Redeemer and we put our trust in her as the Mother whom her divine Son bequeathed to us from the Cross. For this reason, we invoke her frequently as “our hope” because she has shown us Jesus and passed down to us the great things which God constantly does for humanity. She does so simply, as a mother teaches her children at home.

A decisive sign of these great things is given to us in the reading just proclaimed at these Vespers. The people of Jerusalem and their leaders did not acknowledge Christ, yet, by condemning him to death, they fulfilled the words of the prophets (cf. *Acts 13:27*). Human evil and ignorance simply cannot thwart the divine plan of salvation and redemption. Evil is simply incapable of that.

Another of God's great works is evoked in the second of the psalms which we recited: "the rock" turns into "a pool, and flint into a spring of water" (*Ps* 113:8). What might have been a stumbling block and a scandal has, by Jesus' triumph over death, become a cornerstone: "This is the work of the Lord, a marvel in our eyes" (*Ps* 117:23). There is no reason, then, to give in to the despotism of evil. Let us instead ask the risen Lord to manifest his power in our weakness and need.

I have greatly looked forward to this meeting with you, the Pastors of Christ's pilgrim Church in Mexico and in the different countries of this great continent. I see this meeting as an occasion to turn our gaze together to Christ, who has entrusted you with the splendid duty of preaching the Gospel among these peoples of sturdy and deep-rooted Catholic faith. Certainly your dioceses face a number of challenges and difficulties at the present moment. Yet, in the sure knowledge that the Lord is risen, we are able to move forward confidently, in the conviction that evil does not have the last word in human history, and that God is able to open up new horizons to a hope that does not disappoint (cf. *Rom* 5:5).

I thank the Archbishop of Tlalnepantla, President of the Mexican Bishops' Conference and the Latin American Episcopal Council, for the cordial welcome offered me in your name. I ask you, the various Pastors of the local churches that, on returning to your Dioceses, you bring to your faithful the warm affection of the Pope, who holds all their sufferings and aspirations deep in his heart.

In you I see reflected the concerns of the flocks which you shepherd, and I am reminded of the Assemblies of the Synod of Bishops, where the participants applaud after an intervention by someone who exercises his ministry in particularly troubling situations for the Church's life and mission. That applause is a sign of deep faith in the Lord and fraternity in the apostolate, as well as gratitude and admiration for those who sow the Gospel amid thorns, some in the form of persecution, others in the form of social exclusion or contempt. Neither are concerns lacking, for want of means and human resources, or for limitations imposed on the freedom of the Church in carrying out her mission.

The Successor of Peter shares these concerns and he is grateful for your patient and humble pastoral outreach. You are not alone amid your trials or in your successes in the work of evangelization. All of us are one in sufferings and in consolation (cf. *2 Cor* 1:5). Know that you can count on a special place in the prayers of the one who has received from Christ the charge of confirming his brethren in faith (cf. *Lk* 22:31). He now encourages you in your mission of making our Lord Jesus Christ ever better known, loved and followed in these lands, and he urges you not to let yourselves be intimidated by obstacles along the way.

The Catholic faith has significantly marked the life, customs and history of this continent, in which many nations are commemorating the bicentennial of their independence. That was an historical moment in which the name of Christ continued to shine brightly. That name was brought here through the labours of outstanding and self-sacrificing missionaries who proclaimed it boldly and

wisely. They gave their all for Christ, demonstrating that in him men and women encounter the truth of their being and the strength needed both to live fully and to build a truly humane society in accordance with the will of their Creator. This ideal of putting the Lord first and making God's word effective in all, through the use of your own native expressions and best traditions, continues to provide outstanding inspiration for the Church's Pastors today.

The initiatives planned for the *Year of Faith* must be aimed at guiding men and women to Christ; his grace will enable them to cast off the bonds of sin and slavery, and to progress along the path of authentic and responsible freedom. A great contribution will be made to this goal by the *continental mission* being launched from Aparecida, which is already reaping a harvest of ecclesial renewal in the particular Churches of Latin America and the Caribbean. This includes the study, dissemination and prayerful reading of sacred Scripture, which proclaims the love of God and our salvation. I encourage you to continue to share freely the treasures of the Gospel, so that they can become a powerful source of hope, freedom and salvation for everyone (cf. *Rom 1:16*). May you also be faithful witnesses and interpreters of the words of the incarnate Son, whose life was to do the will of the Father and who, as a man among men, gave himself up completely for our sake, even unto death.

Dear Brother Bishops, amid the challenges now facing us in our pastoral care and our preaching of the Gospel, it is essential to show great concern for your seminarians, encouraging them humbly "to know nothing ... except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (*1 Cor 2:2*). No less fundamental is the need to remain close to your priests; they must never lack the understanding and encouragement of their Bishop, nor, if necessary, his paternal admonition in response to improper attitudes. Priests are your first co-workers in the sacramental communion of the priesthood, and you ought to show them a constant and privileged attention. The same should be said for the different forms of consecrated life, whose charisms need to be gratefully esteemed and responsibly encouraged, in a way respectful of the gift received. Greater attention is due to the members of the lay faithful most engaged in the fields of catechesis, liturgical animation, charitable activity and social commitment. Their faith formation is critical if the Gospel is to become present and fruitful in contemporary society. It is not right for them to feel treated like second-class citizens in the Church, despite the committed work which they carry out in accordance with their proper vocation, and the great sacrifice which this dedication at times demands of them. In all of this, it is particularly important for Pastors to ensure that a spirit of communion reigns among priests, religious and the lay faithful, and that sterile divisions, criticism and unhealthy mistrust are avoided.

With these heartfelt words of encouragement, I urge you to be vigilant in proclaiming day and night the glory of God, which is the life of mankind. Stand beside those who are marginalized as the result of force, power or a prosperity which is blind to the poorest of the poor. The Church cannot separate the praise of God from service to others. The one God, our Father and Creator, has made us brothers and sisters: to be human is to be a brother and guardian to our neighbour. Along

this path, in union with the whole human family, the Church must relive and make present what Jesus was: the Good Samaritan who came from afar, entered our human history, lifted us up and sought to heal us.

Beloved Brother Bishops, the Church in Latin America, which has often been joined to Christ in his passion, must continue to be a seed of hope enabling the world to see how the fruits of the resurrection have come to enrich these lands.

May the Mother of God, invoked as Our Lady of Light, dispel the darkness of our world and illumine our path, so that we can confirm the faith of the people of Latin America amid their struggles and aspirations, with integrity, valour and firm faith in the One who can do all things and loves all men and women to the fullest. Amen.

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