



The Holy See

***VIDEO-MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE COLOMBIAN PRELATES
ON THE OCCASION OF THE 85th PLENARY ASSEMBLY
OF THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE OF COLOMBIA***

*Your Eminences,
President of the Episcopal Conference of Colombia,
Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,*

I greet you with deep fraternal affection in the words of St Paul: "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil 1: 2). With him, I also say to you that "I give thanks to my God every time I think of you - which is constantly, in every prayer I utter - rejoicing as I plead on your behalf, at the way you have all continually helped promote the Gospel" (Phil 1: 3-5).

You have gathered for the 85th Plenary Assembly of this Episcopal Conference and you celebrate with gratitude to the Lord the Centenary of this venerable institution which fosters collegial affection and helps you to exercise certain pastoral functions in a concordant and well-coordinated manner, thus harmoniously encouraging Christian life throughout the Country.

I cordially join in this important commemoration, aware that the Episcopal Conference of Colombia, which came into being in 1908 at the request of the First Plenary Council of Latin America, has given a constant impetus to the Church's evangelizing mission in that beloved Nation. It has done this by seeking adequate ways and means to strengthen ecclesial life in those lands and to encourage the baptized to respond generously to their vocation to holiness.

At this time it is right to remember and to thank God for the distinguished Pastors who were members of your Conference in this century of progress. They are, for everyone, an eloquent testimony of apostolic zeal and outstanding virtue who invite us to continue to respond with prompt dedication, firm faith and renewed fervour to the challenges that confront the Church in your Homeland today.

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate, this is a providential moment to receive the witness of those who have gone before us and to help our brethren to strengthen their friendship with Jesus Christ, to welcome his word with purity of heart, to celebrate the sacraments joyfully and to serve everyone with enthusiasm, especially the most underprivileged, bringing them a message of peace, justice and reconciliation. As Pastors of the Church, it is our task to precede and guide the People of God, leading them on the right path, for they need to see us as authentic men of God and to know that we pray every day for their anxieties, sufferings, efforts and worries. As disciples, let us listen, learn and follow the Teacher and, as apostles and missionaries, let us help those who are close to us, as well as those who are distant, to find in Christ the fullness of life for which they yearn.

I want to tell you that you are not alone in this undertaking. My prayers and spiritual closeness go with you in your efforts to make the Gospel resound in every corner of Colombia, through the initiatives begun in the field of pastoral work in education and at the university, in the care you offer to prisoners, the sick, the elderly, the native peoples, workers, evacuees, youth and families.

Certain that you are laying solid foundations for a promising future and for the good of the whole Church, I also encourage you to intensify your attention to priests, seminarians, missionaries, and men and women religious, and to give new dynamism to the various formation programmes for catechists, lay people and pastoral workers.

Nor can I forget your endeavour to be men in agreement and your continuous appeals for an end to be put to the violence, kidnapping and extortion suffered by many people of your beloved Land. I pray God ardently that these situations which have caused such great suffering may end as quickly as possible, and that a lasting and just peace may prevail in Colombia in an atmosphere of hope and well-being.

Allow me to express my special remembrance for the Bishops emeritus to whom I ask you to convey my esteem and gratitude. I am also pleased to extend these sentiments to the priests, religious and lay people who work with you in their different capacities in your Conference's initiatives.

I place under the motherly protection of Our Lady of Chiquinquirá the various activities you have planned this year to celebrate this event, especially the Fourth National Congress for Reconciliation and the "Catholic Expo" which will take place in the coming month of August. I also entrust to Our Lady's Immaculate Heart the intentions of all of you, as well as of your diocesan communities and of the entire beloved Colombian People. With these sentiments and good wishes and as a pledge of abundant heavenly favours, I impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you all.

From the Vatican, 30 June 2008

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