



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE CANADIAN BISHOPS
FROM THE ECCLESIASTICAL CIRCUMSCRIPTION OF QUEBEC
ON THEIR «AD LIMINA» VISIT***

*Clementine Hall
Thursday, 11 May 2006*

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

I am pleased to welcome you, Pastors of the Church in the ecclesiastical region of Quebec who have come to make your *ad limina* visit and to share your worries and hopes with the Successor of Peter and his collaborators.

Our meeting is an expression of the deep communion that unites each one of your Dioceses with the See of Peter. I thank Bishop Gilles Cazabon, President of the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Quebec, for presenting the sometimes difficult context in which you carry out your pastoral ministry. Through you, I would also like to greet warmly the members of your Dioceses, the priests, deacons, men and women religious and lay people, with appreciation for the part that many play in the life of the Church. May God bless the generous efforts made to proclaim to all the Good News of the Risen Lord!

With the three other groups of Bishops from your Country, I will have the occasion to continue my Reflection on important topics for the Church's mission in Canadian society, marked by pluralism, subjectivism and increasing secularism.

In 2008, when Quebec will be celebrating its fourth centenary, your region will host the International Eucharistic Congress. I would also like first of all to invite your Dioceses to a renewal of the meaning and practice of the Eucharist, through a rediscovery of the essential place that "the

Eucharist, the gift of God for the life of the world" must have in the life of the Church. In fact, in your quinquennial reports, you have stressed the notable decline in religious practice in recent years, noting in particular that few young people go to Eucharistic gatherings. The faithful must be convinced that it is vital to take part regularly in Sunday Mass if their faith is to increase and be expressed coherently.

Indeed, the Eucharist, source and summit of Christian life, unites us and conforms us to the Son of God. It also builds the Church and strengthens her unity as the Body of Christ; no Christian community can be established if it is not founded and centred in the Eucharistic celebration.

In spite of the ever greater difficulties that you are experiencing, it is the duty of Pastors to offer to all the effective possibility of fulfilling the Sunday precept and to invite them to participate. Gathered in church to celebrate the Pasch of the Lord, the faithful draw from this Sacrament light and strength in order to live their baptismal vocation to the full.

Furthermore, the meaning of the Sacrament does not end with the celebration. In "receiving the Bread of Life, the disciples of Christ ready themselves to undertake with the strength of the Risen Lord and his Spirit the tasks which await them in their ordinary life" (*Dies Domini*, n. 45). Having lived and proclaimed the presence of the Risen One, the faithful will have at heart to be evangelizers and witnesses in their daily life.

However, the decline in the number of priests, which sometimes makes the celebration of Sunday Mass impossible in certain places, disconcertingly calls into question the place of sacramentality in the life of the Church. The needs of pastoral organization must not compromise the authenticity of the ecclesiology that is expressed in it. The central role of the priest, who teaches, sanctifies and governs the community *in persona Christi capitis*, must not be minimized. The ministerial priesthood is indispensable to the existence of an ecclesial community. The importance of the role of lay people, whose generous service to the Christian communities I acknowledge, must never overshadow the ministry of priests, which is absolutely indispensable to the life of the Church. Thus, the ministry of the priest cannot be entrusted to others without damaging the authenticity of the very existence of the Church. Furthermore, how can young men desire to become priests if the role of the ordained ministry is not clearly defined and recognized?

Nonetheless, it is always necessary to point out as a real sign of hope the thirst for renewal that is making itself felt among the faithful. The [World Youth Day events in Toronto](#) have had a positive impact on many young Canadians. The celebration of the Year of the Eucharist has made a spiritual awakening possible, especially through the development of Eucharistic Adoration. The worship of the Eucharist outside of the Mass but strictly linked to the celebration, is also of great value for the life of the Church, for it aspires to sacramental and spiritual communion. As John Paul II wrote, "If in our time Christians must be distinguished above all by the 'art of prayer', how can we not feel a renewed need to spend time in spiritual converse, in silent adoration, in heartfelt

love before Christ present in the Most Holy Sacrament?" (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, n. 25). From this experience we cannot but receive strength, comfort and support.

The life of prayer and contemplation founded on the Eucharistic mystery is also at the heart of the vocation of consecrated people who have chosen the path of the *sequela Christi*, to give themselves to the Lord with an undivided heart in an ever more intimate relationship with him. By their unconditional attachment to Christ and to his Church, they have the special mission to reminding everyone of the universal vocation to holiness.

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate, the Church is grateful to the Institutes of Consecrated Life of your Country for the apostolic and spiritual commitment of their members. This commitment is expressed in many ways but especially through contemplative life, which causes a ceaseless prayer of praise and intercession to rise to God, and also in the generous service of the catechetical and charitable activities of your Dioceses and closeness to the most underprivileged members of society, thus manifesting the Lord's bounty to the humble and the poor. It is through this daily commitment that the search for holiness, which consecrated people wish to live, matures, particularly through a way of life different from that of the world and the surrounding culture.

However, through these commitments it is of paramount importance that while having an intense spiritual life, consecrated men and women proclaim that God alone can give fullness to human existence.

To help consecrated people live their specific vocation in authentic fidelity to the Church and to her Magisterium, I therefore ask you to pay special attention to strengthening relations of trust with them and with their Institutes. Consecrated life is a gift of God for the benefit of the entire Church and for the service of life in the world. It is therefore necessary that it develop in solid ecclesial communion.

The challenges that confront the consecrated life can only be faced by showing profound unity among its members and with the whole of the Church and her Pastors. I therefore invite consecrated people, men and women, to increase their sense of Church and their concern to work ever more closely with the Pastors, accepting and spreading the Church's teaching in its integrity and completeness.

Ecclesial communion, which is based on the person of Jesus Christ himself, also demands fidelity to the Church's teaching, especially through a correct interpretation of the Second Vatican Council: in other words, as I have said before, in "the 'hermeneutic of reform', of renewal in the continuity of the one subject-Church which the Lord has given to us" (*Christmas Address to the Roman Curia*, 22 December 2005; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 4 January 2006, p. 5). Indeed, if we read and receive the Council in this way, "It can be and can become increasingly

powerful for the ever necessary renewal of the Church" (*ibid.*, p. 6).

The renewal of priestly and Religious vocations must also be a permanent concern for the Church in your Country. True pastoral care for vocations will draw strength from the lives of men and women who witness to passionate love for God and for their brethren, in faithfulness to Christ and the Church. And one cannot overlook the essential place of confident prayer in order to create a new sensitivity in the Christian people that will enable the young to respond to the Lord's call. A primordial duty for you and for the entire Christian community is to fearlessly transmit the Lord's call, inspire vocations and accompany young people on the path of discernment and commitment in the joy of giving themselves in celibacy. In this spirit, it is your task to be attentive to the catechesis provided for children and young people, to enable them to know the truth of the Christian mystery and to have access to Christ.

On this topic I therefore invite the entire Catholic community of Quebec to renew its adherence to the truth of the Church's teaching with regard to theology and morals, two inseparable aspects of being Christians in the world. The faithful cannot subscribe to the ideologies that are spreading in society today without losing their own identity.

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate, at the end of our meeting I would like to encourage you warmly in your ministry at the service of the Church in Canada. May the Risen Christ give you joy and peace as you lead the faithful on the paths of hope, so that they may be authentic Gospel witnesses in Canadian society. I wholeheartedly impart the Apostolic Blessing to you all.

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