



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY
OF THE PONTIFICAL COMMISSION FOR LATIN AMERICA**

Clementine Hall

Saturday, 20 January 2007

Your Eminences,

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

I am very pleased to receive and to greet with affection the Councillors and Members of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America on the occasion of their Plenary Assembly. I thank the President, Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re, for his courteous words that express your common sentiments and the profound desire to renew your commitment to serve, *cum Petro et sub Petro*, the pilgrim Church in Latin America, following the example of Christ, the Good Shepherd, who loved his sheep and gave himself for them.

In thinking of the challenges that threaten Evangelization at the beginning of this Third Millennium, you have chosen as the theme for reflection at this meeting: "*The family and Christian education in Latin America*", perfectly in tune with the unforgettable World Meeting of Families last spring in Valencia, Spain. It was a joyful event that I was able to share with Catholic families from across the world, many of whom were Latin American.

Your presence here reminds me of the Fifth General Conference of the Latin American Episcopate and of the Caribbean, which I have convoked in Aparecida, Brazil, and will have the pleasure of opening. I ask the Holy Spirit, who always helps his Church, to grant that the glory of God the Merciful Father and the paschal presence of his Son may guide and illumine the work of this important ecclesial event so that it may be a sign, a witness and a force of communion for the entire Church in Latin America.

This Conference, in continuity with the four previous ones, is called to give a new stimulus to

Evangelization in this vast, chiefly Catholic region of the world, the home of a large part of the community of believers.

The Message of Salvation must be proclaimed in its integrity, so that it can succeed in permeating the roots of the culture and become embodied in this period of Latin American history, to respond better to its legitimate needs and aspirations.

At the same time, the dignity of every human being should be recognized and defended as a fundamental criterion in social, cultural and economic projects so that they contribute to building history in accordance with God's plan. In fact, the history of Latin America offers a multitude of witnesses, men and women who faithfully followed Christ in such a radical way that, inspired by the divine fire which totally consumed them, they forged the Christian identity of the Continent's peoples. Their exemplary lives are an invitation to follow in their footsteps.

The Church in Latin America is facing enormous challenges: the cultural changes that result from a social communications media that conditions the mindset and morals of millions of people; the migratory flows, with countless repercussions on family life and on religious practice in the new milieus; the re-emergence of questions on how peoples should take on their historical memory and their democratic future; the globalization, secularism, increasing poverty and ecological deterioration, especially in the large cities, as well as violence and the drug trade.

In the face of all this, there is an urgent need for a new Evangelization that impels us to deepen our knowledge of the values of our faith, so that they may become a lifeline and develop the identity of these beloved peoples who will one day receive the light of the Gospel.

Therefore, the theme chosen to guide this Conference's reflections: *Disciples and missionaries of Jesus Christ, so that our peoples may have life in him*, seems timely. In fact, the Fifth Conference must encourage every Christian to convert and become a true disciple of Jesus Christ, sent out by him as an apostle and, as Pope John Paul II said, with a commitment "not of re-evangelization, but rather, of a new evangelization; new in its ardour, methods and expression", so that the Good News may take root in the lives and consciences of all the men and women of Latin America (*Address at the Opening of the 19th Ordinary Plenary Assembly of the Latin American Episcopal Council [CELAM], III, Port-au-Prince Cathedral, Haiti, 9 March 1983; L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 18 April, p. 9).

Dear Brothers, the men and women of Latin America are thirsting for God. When the life of communities feels as though it were bereft of God the Father, the work of Bishops, priests and other pastoral workers becomes vital, so that they may witness as Christ did to the fact that God the Father is always provident Love who revealed himself in his Son. When faith is not nourished by prayer and meditation on the divine Word, when sacramental life languishes, then sects and new pseudo-religious groups thrive, causing many Catholics to distance themselves from the

Church.

The failure to respond to their deepest aspirations - which could be found in a shared life of faith - gives rise to spiritual emptiness. In the work of Evangelization, it is fundamental to remember always that at Pentecost the Father and the Son sent forth the Holy Spirit, and that this same Spirit continues to enliven the life of the Church.

Therefore, what is important is the sense of ecclesial belonging where the Christian grows and matures in communion with his brethren, children of the same God and Father.

"I am the Way, and the Truth and the Life; no one comes to the Father but by me" (Jn 14: 6).

As my venerable Predecessor, John Paul II, pointed out in his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in America*: "Jesus Christ is thus the definitive answer to the question of the meaning of life, and to those fundamental questions which still trouble so many men and women on the American Continent" (n. 10).

Only by living their love for Jesus Christ intensely and dedicating themselves generously to the service of charity will his disciples be eloquent and credible witnesses of God's love for every human being.

In this way, loving with God's love, they will play an active part in the world's transformation, establishing in it a new civilization which beloved Pope Paul VI rightly used to call, *"the civilization of love"* (cf. *Address at the Closure of the Holy Year*, 25 December 1975).

For the future of the Church in Latin America and the Caribbean it is important that Christians have a deeper knowledge and adopt an appropriate lifestyle as Jesus' disciples, simple and joyful with a firm faith rooted in the depths of their heart and nourished by prayer and the sacraments.

In fact, the Christian faith is nourished above all by the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist, in which is brought about a unique and special community encounter with Christ, his life and his Word.

The true disciple grows and develops in the family and in the parish and diocesan communities; he becomes a missionary when he proclaims Christ and his Gospel in all areas of life: school, business, culture, politics and the means of social communications.

In a special way, the frequently recurring phenomena of exploitation and injustice, corruption and violence, are a pressing appeal to Christians to live their faith consistently and to strive to receive a firm doctrinal and spiritual formation, thereby helping to build a more just, more human and more Christian society.

It is an important duty to encourage Christians to work tirelessly, enlivened by their spirit of faith and charity, to offer new opportunities to those who live in poverty or in the most forsaken suburban areas, by bringing them a message of faith, hope and charity so that these poor individuals may actively undertake their own development.

To conclude, I return to the theme of your meeting during these days on the Christian family, the privileged context in which to live and pass on faith and the virtues. It is in the family home that the patrimony of the faith is preserved; it is here that children receive the gift of life, feel loved for what they are and learn the values that will help them live as God's children.

In this way, the family, accepting the gift of life, becomes a propitious environment in order to respond to the gift of a vocation (cf. [Angelus, Valencia, 8 July 2006](#)), especially now that we feel the urgent need for the Lord to send labourers into his harvest.

Let us ask Mary, a model Mother in the Holy Family, Mother of the Church and Star of Evangelization, to guide the Ecclesial Communities in Latin America and the Caribbean and help the participants in the Fifth Congress to find the best ways to enable those people to have life in Christ and to build the so-called "Continent of hope", a worthy future for every man and every woman.

I encourage you all in your work and I wholeheartedly impart my Apostolic Blessing to you all.

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