



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE BISHOPS OF HONG KONG AND MACAO
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Friday, 27 June 2008

My dear Brother Bishops,

Send forth your Spirit and renew the face of the earth (cf. *Ps* 104:30). With these words I am pleased to extend a warm welcome to you. I thank His Eminence Cardinal Zen for the kind words of filial devotion which he expressed on your behalf. Please be assured of my personal affection and my prayers for you and for all who have been entrusted to your pastoral care. I am thinking at this moment of the priests, the religious men and women and all the lay faithful of your two diocesan communities. This *Ad Limina Apostolorum* visit is an occasion to renew your commitment to make Jesus ever more visible in the Church and better known in society by bearing witness to his love and the truth of his Gospel.

As I wrote in my [letter of 27 May 2007 to the Catholic Church in China](#), referring to the invitation *Duc in altum* (cf. *Lk* 5:4) which Jesus offered to Peter, to his brother Andrew and to the first disciples, "these words ring out for us today, and they invite us to remember the past with gratitude, to live the present with enthusiasm and to look forward to the future with confidence: 'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever' (*Heb* 13:8)" (cf. No. 3). Your two particular Churches are also called to be witnesses to Christ, to look forward in hope and to announce the Gospel facing up to the new challenges that the people of Hong Kong and Macao must embrace.

The Lord has given every man and woman the right to hear the proclamation that Jesus Christ "loved me and gave himself for me" (*Gal* 2:20). Corresponding to this right is the duty to evangelize: "For I preach the Gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!" (*1 Cor* 9:16; cf. *Rom* 10:14). All of the

Church's activities are oriented towards evangelization and may not be separated from the commitment to assist everyone to encounter Christ in faith, which is the primary aim of evangelization: "Social issues and the Gospel are inseparable. When we bring people only knowledge, ability, technical competence and tools, we bring them too little" (Benedict XVI *Homily during Holy Mass at Munich's Neue Messe Esplanade* [10 September 2006] AAS 98 [2006] 710).

The Church's mission is taking place today in the context of globalization. I observed recently that the forces generated by globalization hold humanity suspended between two poles. On the one hand are the many social and cultural bonds which tend to promote attitudes of world-wide solidarity and shared responsibility for the good of mankind. On the other hand, there are worrying signs of fragmentation and individualism dominated by secularism which pushes the transcendent and the sense of the sacred to the margins and eclipses the very source of harmony and unity of the universe. The negative aspects of this cultural phenomenon draw attention to the need for a solid formation and call for concentrated efforts aimed at supporting the spiritual and moral ethos of your people.

I am aware that in both Dioceses, just as in the rest of the Church, an adequate ongoing formation of the clergy is needed. Hence the invitation extended to you as Bishops who are responsible for your ecclesial communities, to give special attention to young priests confronted with new pastoral challenges arising from the task of evangelizing a society as complex as today's. Ongoing formation of the clergy "is an intrinsic requirement of the gift and sacramental ministry received; and it proves necessary in every age. It is particularly urgent today, not only because of rapid changes in the social and cultural conditions of individuals and peoples among whom the priestly ministry is exercised, but also because of that 'new evangelization' which constitutes the essential and pressing task of the Church at the end of the Second Millennium" (John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* [25 March 1992], 70: AAS [1992] 78). Your pastoral solicitude should embrace especially all consecrated men and women, called to render visible in the Church and in the world, the characteristic traits of Jesus, chaste, poor and obedient.

Dear Brothers, as you know, Catholic schools offer an important contribution to the intellectual, spiritual and moral formation of the new generations. This crucial aspect of personal growth is what motivates Catholic parents, and those from other religious traditions, to seek out Catholic schools. In this regard I wish to send greetings to all the men and women who offer generous service to the Catholic schools of both Dioceses. They are called to be "witnesses of Christ, epiphany of the love of God in the world" and to possess "the courage of witnessing and the patience of dialogue" serving "human dignity, the harmony of creation, the existence of peoples and peace" (*Consecrated Persons and their mission in schools*, 1-2). It is therefore of great importance to be close to students and to their families, to watch over the formation of the young in the light of Gospel teaching and to follow closely the spiritual needs of all who form part of the school community. The Catholic schools of your two dioceses have given significant impulse to the social development and cultural growth of your people. Today these educational centres face new

difficulties; be assured that I am with you, and I encourage you to ensure that this important service will never fall by the wayside.

In your mission as Pastors, draw confidence from the Paraclete who defends, counsels and protects (cf. *Jn 14:16*)! Encourage the faithful to welcome all to which the Spirit gives birth! I have recalled on different occasions that ecclesial movements and new communities are a “luminous sign of the beauty of Christ and of the Church his Bride” (cf. *Message to the Participants in the Congress of 22 May 2006*). Addressing them as my “dear friends of the movements”, I encouraged them to act so that they would always be “schools of communion, journeying together and learning the truth and the love that Jesus has revealed and communicated to us through the witness of the Apostles, in the great family of his disciples” (*ibid.*). I exhort you to support the movements with great love because they are one of the most important new realities fostered by the Spirit in the Church in order to put into practice the Second Vatican Council (cf. *Address to the participants of a Seminar promoted by the Pontifical Council for the Laity* [17 May 2008]). I pray too that the movements themselves will make every effort to harmonize their activities with the pastoral and spiritual programmes of the Dioceses.

I am personally grateful to you for the affection and devotion you have shown to the Holy See in different ways. As I congratulate you on the many achievements of your well organized Diocesan communities, I encourage you to even greater commitment in the search for adequate means of presenting the Christian message of love in a more comprehensible way to the world in which you live. By doing so you will effectively show to all your brothers and sisters the enduring youthfulness and inexhaustible capacity for renewal of the Gospel of Christ, and bear witness to the fact that one can be authentically Catholic and authentically Chinese at the same time.

I also encourage your Dioceses to continue your contribution to the life of the Church in mainland China, both by offering personnel for formation purposes and by supporting initiatives in the field of human promotion and assistance. In this regard I cannot but recognize the invaluable service which the charitable organization Caritas of both Dioceses has offered to the needy with such generosity and professionalism. We must never forget however that Christ is also for China a Teacher, Pastor and loving Redeemer. The Church must never allow this good news to remain unspoken.

I hope and pray to the Lord that the day will soon come when your Brother Bishops from mainland China come to Rome on pilgrimage to the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul, as a sign of communion with the Successor of Peter and the Universal Church. I willingly avail myself of the occasion to send to the Catholic community of China and to all the people of that vast country the assurance of my prayers and my affection.

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