



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE BISHOPS OF CUBA
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Friday, 2 May 2008

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

I receive you with great joy at the end of this *ad limina* visit which has brought you to the tombs of the Apostles St Peter and St Paul to strengthen even more the bonds of communion which have always been a feature of the Cuban Bishops' relationship with this Apostolic See. It is a special cause of joy to me to meet you, dear Brothers who look after a Church to which I feel very close in spirit, as I have already had the opportunity to tell you in the [Message I sent through the Cardinal Secretary of State](#) during [his recent visit to Cuba](#).

I warmly thank Archbishop Juan García Rodríguez of Camagüey, President of the Conference of Catholic Bishops of Cuba, for his friendly words of support and sincere affection on behalf of you all and of your diocesan communities.

I am familiar with the vitality of the Church in your beloved Country, as well as your unity and the gift of yourselves to Jesus Christ. Ecclesial life in Cuba has undergone a profound change, especially since the celebration of the National Ecclesial Meeting of Cuba which took place more than 20 years ago, and most especially with [the historic Visit to Cuba of my Venerable Predecessor Pope John Paul II](#). Intense pastoral work has been carried out; despite the many difficulties and limitations, this has helped to strengthen the missionary spirit in all the Cuban ecclesial communities. I therefore invite you to persevere with your daring and generous evangelizing efforts which bring Christ's light to all contexts and places.

In this historical period the Church in your Country is called to offer the one true hope to Cuban society as a whole: Christ our Lord, who triumphed over sin and death (cf. [Spe Salvi](#), n. 27). This hope is the force that has kept Cuban believers unswervingly on the path of faith and love.

All this requires that the development of spiritual life have a central place in your aspirations and your pastoral projects. Only on the basis of a personal experience of encounter with Jesus Christ and with a sound doctrinal preparation rooted in the ecclesial community can Christians become the salt and light of the world (cf. Mt 5: 13-14) and thus appease the thirst for God that is increasingly felt among your fellow citizens.

Priests play a fundamental role in these tasks. I know of the dedication and pastoral zeal with which they give themselves to their brethren, although they are few, even in the midst of great difficulty. I would therefore like to express to all the priests my gratitude and appreciation for their fidelity and their tireless service to the Church and the faithful. I am also confident that the increase in vocations and at the same time the adoption of the proper means in this area will soon enable the Cuban Church to rely on a sufficient number of priests, as well as on the churches and places of worship necessary to carry out her strictly pastoral and spiritual mission. Do not cease to guide and encourage them, for they bear the burden of the day and the scorching heat (cf. Mt 20: 12). Help them too, so that with personal meditation, with praying the Liturgy of the Hours, with the daily celebration of the Eucharist as well as with an adequate continuing formation, they may keep ever alive the gift received with the imposition of hands (cf. II Tm 1: 6).

The increase of priestly vocations is a source of hope. Nevertheless, it is necessary to continue promoting a specific vocations ministry which is not afraid to encourage youth to follow in the footsteps of Christ, the only One who can satisfy their longing for love and happiness. At the same time, care of and attention to the Seminary must always occupy a privileged place in the heart of the Bishop (cf. *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, n. 5) who must allocate to seminaries the best possible human and material means of his diocesan communities, assuring seminarians, through the competence and dedication of chosen formators, the best possible spiritual, intellectual and human formation so that identifying with the sentiments of the Heart of Christ, they may face the demands of the priestly ministry which they must carry out.

I cannot fail to mention and to acknowledge the exemplary work of so many men and women religious, and I encourage them to continue to enrich the fabric of ecclesial life with the treasure of their own charisms and their generous self-giving.

I would also like to thank in particular the many missionaries who offer the gift of their consecration to the entire Church in Cuba.

One of the priority goals of the Pastoral Plan you have worked out is precisely the promotion of a committed laity, conscious of its vocation and mission in the Church and in the world. I therefore ask you to promote in your particular Churches an authentic process of education in the faith at the various levels, with the help of properly trained catechists. Ensure that all have time for reading and prayerful meditation on the Word of God as well as the frequent reception of the Sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist. Thereby, strengthened with an intense spiritual life and relying

on a sound religious preparation, especially with regard to the Church's social teaching, the lay faithful will be able to offer a convincing witness of their faith in all the contexts of society, to enlighten them with the light of the Gospel (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 38). In this regard, I express the hope that the Church in Cuba, in conformity with your legitimate aspirations, may avail herself of normal access to the social communications media.

In a special way I would like to entrust the pastoral care of marriage and the family to you. I know how concerned you are about the situation of the family whose stability is threatened by divorce and its consequences, the practice of abortion or financial difficulties, as well as the break-up of families caused by emigration or other reasons. I encourage you to redouble your efforts so that all, especially the young, may understand better and feel increasingly attracted by the beauty of the authentic values of marriage and the family. Likewise, it is necessary to encourage and to offer the appropriate means to ensure that families can exercise their responsibility and fundamental right to the religious and moral education of their children.

I have noticed with joy the generosity with which the Church in your beloved Nation dedicates herself to serving the poorest and most deprived people, for which she receives esteem and gratitude from all Cubans. I warmly urge you to continue to take to all the needy, the sick, the elderly and prisoners, a visible sign of God's love for them, aware that "the best defence of God and man consists precisely in love" (*Deus Caritas Est*, n. 31). In this way, you offer the whole of Cuba the witness of a Church which shares deeply in its joys, hopes and sufferings.

Dear Brothers, I would like to thank you for all the work you are doing to strengthen the little flock of Cuba and to ensure that it produces increasingly abundant fruits of Christian life, like the grain of wheat that falls to the earth (cf. Jn 12: 24). May the upcoming beatification of the Servant of God Fr José Ola-Ilo Valdés give a new impetus to your service to the Church and the Cuban People, so that it may be at every moment a leaven of reconciliation, justice and peace.

I ask you to convey my affectionate greeting and spiritual closeness to all, and in particular to the Bishops emeritus, to the priests, permanent deacons, religious communities, seminarians and lay faithful, and tell them that the Pope is praying for them while he encourages them to grow in holiness so as to give the best of themselves to God and others.

As you are preparing to celebrate the fourth centenary of the discovery of her venerated image, I entrust you and your intentions to Our Lady of Charity of El Cobre and ask her to protect you and give you strength, while at the same time I impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you all.

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