



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

TO THE BISHOPS OF BOLIVIA

ON THEIR AD LIMINA VISIT

Consistory Hall

Monday, 10 November 2008

Your Eminence,

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

I am delighted to receive you, Bishops of Bolivia, who have come to Rome on an *ad limina* visit to pray at the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul and to renew your bonds of unity, love and peace with the Successor of Peter (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 22). I warmly thank Cardinal Julio Terrazas Sandoval, Archbishop of Santa Cruz de la Sierra and President of the Bishops' Conference, for his kind words on behalf of all. I would first like to express my appreciation to you and to assure you of my encouragement in your generous service to the great task of preserving and nourishing the faith of the People of God.

I am well aware of the difficult circumstances that the faithful and the other inhabitants of your country have been experiencing for some time and that now seem to be becoming more acute. These are certainly a cause of worry and of special pastoral concern for the Church which has been able to remain very close to all Bolivians in delicate situations, with the sole aim of preserving hope, reviving faith, promoting unity and exhorting people to reconciliation and to the safeguard of peace. With their efforts in this task, carried out in a fraternal, solidary and harmonious manner, Pastors recall the Gospel Parable of the Sower, who went out to sow an abundance of seed without thinking in advance about the harvest he would be able to gather for himself.

Other challenges also confront you in your daily work, since the faith implanted in Bolivia constantly needs to be nourished and strengthened, especially when signs are seen of a certain weakening in Christian life that are due to various factors: a widespread lack of coherence

between the faith professed and models of personal and social life or a superficial formation which leaves the baptized exposed to the influence of dazzling but empty promises.

To face these challenges the Church in Bolivia has a powerful means at her disposal: popular piety, the precious treasure accumulated down the centuries thanks to the work of daring missionaries and preserved in Bolivian families for generations with deep fidelity. It is a gift that must certainly be safeguarded and promoted today, as I know is being done with care and dedication but which requires a constant effort to ensure that the value of the signs penetrate the depths of hearts and that they always be illuminated by God's Word and transformed into firm convictions of faith, consolidated by the sacraments and by fidelity to moral values. Indeed, you must cultivate a mature faith and "a firm hope for living out the faith joyfully and responsibly, thus spreading it in one's own surroundings" (*Address at the opening session of the Fifth General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops' Conferences*, Aparecida, Brazil, 13 May 2007).

This will require a systematic, widespread and penetrating catechesis which teaches the Catholic faith clearly and in its integrity. The Pauline Year that we are celebrating is a privileged opportunity to imitate the apostolic and missionary vigour of this great Apostle, who was not afraid at the time to proclaim God's plan in its integrity, as he said to the elders of the Church at Miletus (cf. Acts 20: 27). In fact, a partial or incomplete teaching of the Gospel message does not befit the mission proper to the Church and cannot be fruitful.

A high quality general education that includes the person's spiritual and religious dimension also makes a considerable contribution to building a solid foundation for growth in the faith. The Church in Bolivia has numerous educational institutions, some of great prestige, that must continue to be able to count on the attention of their Pastors so that they may preserve their own identity in them and be respected. In any case, it is necessary not to forget that "All Christians that is, all those who, having been reborn in water and the Holy Spirit are called and in fact are children of God have a right to a Christian education" (*Gravissimum educationis*, n. 2).

I am glad to see your efforts to offer seminarians a sound human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral formation by giving them priests who help them in their vocational discernment and are concerned with their suitability and competence. This criterion, always necessary, becomes even more impelling in the present day when there is an inclination to spread information too thinly and to disrupt his deep interiority, where the human being has a law engraved by God (cf. *Gaudium et spes*, n. 16). For this reason it is necessary to continue to help them, in order to guarantee the continuing formation of the clergy and also of the other pastoral workers, a formation that must constantly nourish their spiritual life and prevent their work from becoming a routine or give in to superficiality. They are called to show the faithful, from their viewpoint, that Jesus' words are spirit and life (cf. Jn 6: 63), "otherwise, how could they proclaim a message whose content and spirit they do not know thoroughly?" (*Address at the opening session of the Fifth General Conference of*

the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops' Conferences, Aparecida, Brazil, 13 May 2007).

The recent Assembly of the Synod of Bishops stressed precisely that "the Church's principal task, at the start of this new millennium, is above all to nourish herself on the Word of God, in order to make new evangelization, the proclamation in our day, more effective" (Homily at the Mass concluding the Synod, 26 October 2008). Thus I warmly urge you to ensure that in your homilies, catecheses, celebrations in parishes and in the many small communities scattered afar, but with their own important chapels, as can be seen in your country, faithful proclamation, listening and meditation on the Scriptures are always given priority, because it is in them that the People of God find their *raison d'être*, their vocation and their identity.

Love for neighbour is born from docile listening to the divine word, disinterested service to the brethren (cf. *ibid.*), a particularly important aspect of pastoral activity in Bolivia, in the face of the situations of poverty, marginalization or abandonment in which a large part of the population lives. The ecclesial community has shown that like the Good Samaritan it has "a pure and generous love... the best witness to the God in whom we believe and by whom we are driven to love" (Deus Caritas Est, n. 31, c). In this sense, the ecclesial community is also, so to speak, a "heart that speaks", which has within it the Word who dwells in the depths of its being and whom it cannot renounce, even though it must sometimes keep silent. Thus, if brotherhood with the neediest brethren make us excellent disciples of the Teacher, special dedication and concern for them transforms us into missionaries of Love.

At the end of this meeting, I would like to reaffirm to you my encouragement in the mission you carry out as guides of the Church in Bolivia, and as you also do in the spirit of communion and concord. A communion enriched by special bonds of close brotherhood with other particular churches, some in distant lands but which desire to share with you in the joys and hopes of evangelization in the country. Please convey my greeting and gratitude to the Bishops emeritus, to the priests and seminarians, to the numerous men and women religious who enrich and enliven your Christian communities, the catechists and other collaborators in your task of bringing the light of the Gospel to Bolivians.

I entrust your intentions to the Most Holy Virgin Mary, so deeply venerated by the Bolivian people in numerous Marian shrines, and I cordially impart to you the Apostolic Blessing.