



The Holy See

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

Consistory Hall

Thursday, 30 April 2009

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate

It is a cause of great joy to me to meet this group of Pastors of the Church in Argentina, concluding their *ad limina* visit. I greet you with affection and hope that this brotherly meeting with the Successor of Peter will help you to feel the heartbeat of the universal Church and to consolidate the bonds of faith, communion and discipline that unite your particular Churches to this Apostolic See. At the same time, I give thanks to the Lord for this new opportunity to strengthen my brothers in the faith (cf. Lk 22: 32), and to share in their joys and concerns, their successes and their difficulties.

I warmly thank Archbishop Luis Héctor Villalba of Tucumán, Vice-President of the Bishops' Conference of Argentina for his cordial words which he addressed to me on your behalf, in which he expressed your sentiments of affection and adherence, as well as those of the priests, religious and lay faithful of your communities.

Dear Brothers, the Lord Jesus has entrusted to us a ministry of exalted value and dignity: to bring his message of peace and reconciliation to all peoples, to assist the holy People of God with fatherly love and lead it along the path of salvation. This task goes far beyond our personal merits and our poor human capacity, but we devote ourselves to it with simplicity and hope, sustained by Christ's words: "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide" (Jn 15: 16). Jesus, the Teacher, watches over you with the love of a brother and a friend, he has called you to enter into intimacy with him and, in consecrating you with the holy oil sacramentally received he has placed the redeeming power of his Blood in your hands, so that, in the certainty of acting always *in persona Christi capitis*, you may be "a living sign of the Lord Jesus, Shepherd and Spouse, Teacher and High Priest of the

Church" (*Pastores Gregis*, n. 7) in the midst of the people entrusted to you.

In the exercise of his episcopal ministry, the Bishop must always act among his faithful as the servant (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 27), drawing constant inspiration from the example of the One who did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (cf. Mk 10: 45). In fact, being a Bishop is a title of honour when one lives with this spirit of service to others and shares humbly and impartially in Christ's mission. Frequent contemplation of the image of the Good Shepherd will serve as an example and as encouragement to you in your efforts to proclaim and spread the Gospel. It will motivate you to care for your faithful with tenderness and mercy, to defend the weak and to spend your life in a constant and generous dedication to the People of God (cf. *Pastores Gregis*, n. 43).

As an essential part of your episcopal ministry in the Church, true *amoris officium* (cf. St Augustine in *In ev. Jo.* 123, 5), I wish to warmly encourage you to foster in your diocesan communities the practice of charity, particularly toward the neediest people. With your closeness and your words, with material aid and prayer, with the appeal for dialogue and in the spirit of understanding that always seeks the common good of the people, and with the light that comes from the Gospel, you want to bear a positive and visible witness to Christ's love among people, to continuously build the Church as the family of God, ever welcoming and merciful to the poorest people so that in all the dioceses charity may prevail in the fulfilment of the mandate of Jesus Christ (cf. *Christus Dominus*, n. 16). In addition, I would also like to insist on the importance of prayer in the face of activism or a secularized vision of Christian charitable work (cf. *Deus Caritas Est*, n. 37). This diligent contact with Christ in prayer transforms the hearts of believers, opening them to the needs of others, without being inspired by the "ideologies aimed at improving the world, but should rather be guided by the faith which works through love" (*ibid.*, n. 33).

I would like in particular to entrust to you the priests, your closest collaborators. May the embrace of peace with which you welcome them on the day of their ordination to the priesthood be a living reality every day and contribute to deepening ever more the bonds of affection, respect and trust that unite you to them by virtue of the sacrament of Orders. Recognizing your priests' self-denial and devotion to the ministry, I would also like to invite them to identify more and more with the Lord, demonstrating with their virtues and good example that they are true models for the flock, and tending God's flock lovingly (cf. 1 Pt 5: 2-3).

The specific vocation of the lay faithful leads them to seek to live an upright social life and to illumine earthly realities with the light of the Gospel. May lay people, conscious of the commitments assumed in Baptism and inspired by the charity of Christ, participate actively in the Church's mission, as well as in their country's social, political economic and cultural life. In this regard, Catholics must distinguish themselves among their fellow citizens through their exemplary fulfilment of civil duties as well as by the exercise of the human and Christian virtues that contribute to improving personal, social and working relations. Their commitment will also lead

them to promote in a special way those values that are essential to the common good of society, such as peace, justice, solidarity, the good of the family founded on the marriage between a man and a woman, the protection of human life from its conception until its natural death, and the right and duty of parents to raise their children in accordance with their own moral and religious convictions.

I would like to end by asking you to carry my affectionate greeting to all the members of your diocesan churches. Tell the Bishops emeritus, the priests, the seminarians, the men and women religious, and all the lay faithful that the Pope thanks them for their work for the Lord and the Gospel cause, that he hopes and trusts in their fidelity to the Church. Dear Bishops of Argentina, I thank you for your pastoral concern and I assure you of my spiritual closeness and of my constant prayers. I cordially entrust you to the protection of *Nuestra Señora de Luján* and I impart to you a special Apostolic Blessing.

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