



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE BISHOPS OF THE SOUTH 1 ECCLESIASTICAL REGION
OF THE BRAZILIAN BISHOP'S CONFERENCE
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Saturday, 14 November 2009

*Your Eminence,
Dear Archbishops
and Bishops of Brazil,*

Today, during your visit *ad limina Apostolorum*, you have gathered in the House of the Successor of Peter who welcomes you all with open arms, beloved Pastors of the South 1 Region, in the State of São Paulo.

It is there that is located the important centre of hospitality and evangelization, the Shrine of Nossa Senhora Aparecida, which I had the joy of visiting in May 2007 for the inauguration of the Fifth General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops' Conferences. I express the wish that the seed sown at that time may bear worthwhile fruit for the spiritual and social good of the population of this promising continent, of the beloved Brazilian nation and of your Federal State. "The peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean have the right to a full life, proper to the children of God, under conditions that are more human: free from the threat of hunger and from every form of violence" (Address at the inaugural session of the Fifth General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops' Conferences, 13 May 2007). I would like to say "thank you" once again for all that was done with such great generosity and I wish to renew my cordial greeting to you and to your dioceses, especially recalling the priests, consecrated men and women and lay faithful who help you in the work of evangelization and the Christian animation of society.

Your people cherish in their hearts a great religious sentiment and noble traditions, rooted in

Christianity, which they express in deep and genuine religious and civil demonstrations. This is a patrimony rich in values, which as your reports show and as Bishop Nelson Westrupp has just mentioned in his cordial greeting to me on your behalf you seek to maintain, defend, spread, deepen and enliven. As I warmly rejoice in all this, I urge you to persevere in your work of constant and methodical evangelization, aware that the authentic Christian formation of the conscience is crucial for a profound life of faith as well as for social development and for the real, balanced well-being of the human community.

In fact, if a human group is to deserve the title "community" its organization and aims must correspond with the fundamental aspirations of the human being. It is therefore not an exaggeration to say that an authentic social life begins in the conscience of each one. Since a properly formed conscience leads to achieving the true good of humankind, the Church, defining what this good is, enlightens the human being all through the whole of Christian life, seeks to educate the human conscience. The Church's teaching resounds with a profound and persuasive echo in the heart of every person believers and non-believers alike because it derives its origins from God; from its content, the truth; and from its foundation, the conscience. In practice, "the issue of life and its defence and promotion is not a concern of Christians alone. Although faith provides special light and strength, this question arises in every human conscience which seeks the truth and which cares about the future of humanity.... The "people of life' rejoices in being able to share its commitment with so many others. Thus may the "people for life' constantly grow in number and may a new culture of love and solidarity develop for the true good of the whole of human society" (Encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*, n. 25 March 1995, n. 101).

Venerable Brothers, speak to your people's hearts, reawaken their consciences, reunite their wills in a common action against the rising tide of violence and contempt for human life. From being a gift of God accepted in the loving intimacy of marriage between a man and a woman, the human being has come to be regarded as a mere human product. "A particularly crucial battleground in today's cultural struggle between the supremacy of technology and human moral responsibility is the field of bioethics, where the very possibility of integral human development is radically called into question. In this most delicate and critical area, the fundamental question asserts itself forcefully: is man the product of his own labours or does he depend on God? Scientific discoveries in this field and the possibilities of technological intervention seem so advanced as to force a choice between two types of reasoning: reason open to Transcendence or reason closed within immanence" (Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, 29 June 2009, n. 74). Job, in a provocative way, calls irrational beings to bear witness themselves: "But ask the beasts, and they will teach you; the birds of the air, and they will tell you; or the plants of the earth, and they will teach you; and the fish of the sea will declare to you. Who among all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this? In his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of all mankind." (Job 12: 7-10). The conviction of right reason and the certainty of faith that human life, from its conception to natural death belongs to God and not to the human being, gives the human being that sacred character and personal dignity which the one legal and correct moral attitude inspires: profound

respect. For the Lord of life said: "For your life-blood I will surely require a reckoning.... for God made man in his own image" (Gen 9: 5-6).

Beloved and Venerable Brothers, we can never tire in our appeal to the conscience. We would not be faithful followers of our divine Teacher were we not to be able in all situations, even the most difficult, to remain steadfast "in hope... against hope" (Rom 4: 18). Continue to work for the triumph of God's cause, not with the downcast heart of those who only see what is lacking and danger, but with the firm trust of those who know they can count on Christ's victory. Mary is ineffably united to the Lord, in full conformity with her Son, victorious over sin and death. Through the intercession of Nossa Senhora Aparecida, I implore from God light, comfort, strength, determination and success for you and for your most direct collaborators, and at the same time I cordially impart to you a special Apostolic Blessing, which I extend to all the faithful of every diocesan community.

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