



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI  
TO THE SECOND GROUP OF BISHOPS  
OF THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE OF BRAZIL  
(NORTH EAST II REGION) ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

*Papal Summer Residence, Castel Gandolfo  
Thursday, 17 September 2009*

*Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,*

Like the Apostle Paul at the dawn of the Church, you have come, beloved Pastors of the Ecclesiastical Provinces of Olinda e Recife, Paraíba, Maceió and Natal, to visit Peter (cf. *Gal 1: 18*). I welcome and greet with affection each one of you, starting with Archbishop Antônio of Maceió. I thank him for conveying your sentiments and also expressing the joys, difficulties and hopes of the pilgrim People of God in the *North East II Region*. Through each one of you, I embrace the priests and faithful of your diocesan communities.

With her faithful and with her ministers, the Church is the priestly community on earth. She is organically structured as the Body of Christ to carry out effectively her historical mission of salvation, united with her Head. This is what St Paul teaches us: "You are the body of Christ and individually members of it" (1 Cor 12: 27). In fact, the members do not all have the same function: it is this that constitutes the beauty and life of the body (cf. 1 Cor 12: 14-17). The specific identity of the ordained faithful and lay people may be understood through the fundamental difference between the ministerial priesthood and the common priesthood. This is why the secularization of priests and the clericalization of lay people must be avoided. Thus, in this perspective, the lay faithful must engage to express in reality and also through political commitment the Christian anthropological vision and the social doctrine of the Church.

In other words priests must steer clear of personal involvement in politics in order to encourage the unity and communion of all the faithful and thus be a reference point for all. It is important to

increase this knowledge in priests, in religious and in the lay faithful, encouraging and taking care in order that each may feel motivated to act according to his or her own state.

The harmonious, correct and clear deepening of the relationship between the common priesthood and the ministerial priesthood is one of the most delicate issues in the existence and life of the Church. In fact, the small number of priests could lead communities to resign themselves to this shortage, finding comfort, at times, in the fact that the lack of priests makes the role of the lay faithful more prominent. However, it is not the lack of priests that justifies a more active and consistent participation of lay people. The more aware the faithful become of their responsibilities in the Church the more clearly stand out the priest's identity and his irreplaceable role as Pastor of the community overall, as a witness of the authenticity of the faith and a steward on behalf of Christ the Head of the mysteries of salvation.

We know that the "saving mission entrusted by the Father to his incarnate Son was committed to the Apostles and through them to their successors: they receive the Spirit of Jesus to act in his name and in his person. The ordained minister is the sacramental bond that ties the liturgical action to what the Apostles said and did and, through them, to the words and actions of Christ, the source and foundation of the sacraments" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 1120*). For this reason, the role of the priest is essential and irreplaceable for the proclamation of the word and for the celebration of the sacraments, especially of the Eucharist, the memorial of the supreme Sacrifice of Christ who gives his Body and his Blood. I therefore urge you to ask the Lord to send labourers to his harvest; furthermore, it is necessary for priests to express the joy of fidelity to their identity with the enthusiasm of the mission.

Beloved Brothers, I am sure that with your pastoral concern and with prudence, you will take special pains to guarantee the communities of your respective dioceses the presence of an ordained minister. Although many of you are obliged to organize ecclesial life with few priests, it is important to ensure that the current situation is not regarded as normal or typical of the future. As I recalled [last week to the first group of Brazilian Bishops](#), you must focus your efforts on awakening new priestly vocations and on finding the indispensable pastors for your dioceses, helping one another so that all may have at their disposal better trained and more numerous priests to support the life of faith and the apostolic mission of the faithful.

On the other hand, those who have received Sacred Orders are also called to live with consistency and in fullness the grace and commitments of Baptism, in other words to offer themselves and their whole life in union with Christ's sacrifice. The daily celebration of the Sacrifice of the Altar and praying daily the Liturgy of the Hours must always be accompanied by the testimony of an existence that becomes a gift to God and to others and thus serves as an orientation for the faithful.

In recent months, the Church has had her gaze fixed on the exemplary Holy Curé d'Ars who asked

the faithful to unite their own lives with the Sacrifice of Christ and offered himself, exclaiming: "How well a priest does to offer himself as a sacrifice to God every morning!" (*Le Curé d'Ars. Sa pensée - son coeur*, coord. Bernard Nodet, 1966, p. 104). He continues to be an up-to-date model for your priests, especially in living celibacy as a requirement of the total gift of self, an expression of that pastoral charity which the [Second Vatican Council](#) presents as a unifying centre of priestly existence and action. [Frei Antônio de Sant'Anna Galvão](#) [Fra Anthony of St Anne Galvão], whom I had the joy of [canonizing on 11 May 2007](#), lived in almost the same period as the Curé d'Ars in São Paulo, in our beloved Brazil. He too left us a "witness as an ardent adorer of the Eucharist", living in "laus perennis, in a constant attitude of adoration" (*Homily for the canonization of Bl. Fra Anthony of St Anne Galvão*, n. 2). In this way they both sought to imitate Jesus Christ, each making himself not only a priest but also a victim and an oblation, like Jesus.

Beloved Brothers in the Episcopate, numerous signs of hope for the future of your particular Churches are already visible, a future that God is preparing through the zeal and fidelity with which you exercise your episcopal ministry. I would like to assure you of my fraternal support and at the same time I ask you for your prayers so that I may be granted to strengthen everyone in the faith of the Apostles (cf. Lk 22: 32). May the Blessed Virgin Mary intercede for the whole People of God in Brazil, so that Pastors and faithful, with courage and joy may boldly "proclaim the mystery of the Gospel" (cf. Eph 6: 19). With this prayer, I impart my Apostolic Blessing to you, to the priests, and to all the faithful of your dioceses "Peace to all of you that are in Christ" (1 Pt 5: 14).

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