



The Holy See

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

*Consistory Hall
Friday, 22 June 2012*

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

1. I receive you with great joy, Pastors of God's pilgrim Church in Colombia who have come to Rome on your *ad limina* visit thereby to strengthen the bonds that link you to this Apostolic See. As Successor of Peter it is a precious opportunity to tell you again of my affection and appreciation. I am grateful for the friendly words addressed to me on behalf of all by Archbishop Rubén Salazar Gómez of Bogota, President of the Bishops' Conference, presenting the situations that concern you as well as the challenges that the communities over which you preside in the faith are facing.

2. I am aware of the efforts you have made over the past few years, both in the Bishops' Conference and in your particular Churches, to implement projects that encourage a renewed and fruitful wave of evangelization. Colombia is not in fact a stranger to the consequences of God's being forgotten. Whereas years ago it was possible to recognize a unitive cultural fabric whose reference to the content of the faith and to what it inspired were broadly accepted, today, in many social milieus this no longer seems to be the case. This is because the crisis in spiritual and moral values has had a negative effect on many of your fellow-citizens. Therefore it is indispensable to rekindle in all the faithful their awareness of being disciples and missionaries of Christ, feeding the roots of their faith, strengthening their hope and invigorating their testimony of charity.

3. In this regard, you have expressed your yearning for evangelization in the Overall Plan of the Bishops' Conference (2012-2020). This resulted from a conscientious discernment of the times in which the Church in Colombia is living. I would like to encourage you to follow its guidelines with

tenacity and perseverance. Do so by strengthening the communion to which bishops are called in the exercise of their mission so that, with agreement on the pastoral guidelines and in unanimity of purpose, the ministry the Lord has entrusted to you will bear fruit in abundance. With this same goal make the most of the reflections of the upcoming Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, as well as of the proposals of the Year of Faith which I have announced in order to enhance your magisterium and beneficially irrigate your apostolate.

4. The increase in religious pluralism is a factor that demands serious consideration. The ever more active presence of Pentecostal and Evangelical communities, not only in Colombia but also in many Latin American regions, cannot be ignored or underestimated. In this regard it is obvious that the People of God is called to purify itself and to revitalize its faith, letting itself be guided by the Holy Spirit, thereby giving impetus to his pastoral action, for “sincere people who leave our Church often do not do so for what ‘non-Catholic’ groups believe in but do so basically because of what they are living through; not for doctrinal but rather for existential reasons; not for strictly dogmatic but for pastoral reasons; not for the theological but for the methodological problems of our Church” (*Final Document Fifth General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops’ Conferences*, n. 225 [in Spanish]). It is thus a question of being better believers, more devout, reliable and welcoming in our parishes and communities, so that no one feels distant or left out.

Catechesis must be reinforced, paying special attention to young people and adults; homilies should be prepared carefully, and likewise the teaching of the Catholic doctrine in schools and universities should be promoted. And all this is essential if in the baptized the sense of belonging to the Church is to be recovered, and if their aspiration to share the joy of following Christ and of being members of his mystical body is to be reawakened. It is likewise important to appeal to the Church’s Tradition, to develop Marian spirituality and to foster a rich devotional diversity. Facilitating a serene and open exchange with other Christians without losing one’s own identity can also contribute to improving relations with them and to overcoming the unnecessary challenge and conflicts.

5. Motivated by apostolic zeal and aiming for the common good, do not hesitate to identify all that hinders upright progress in Colombia, seeking to meet the needs of those who are deprived of freedom because of iniquitous violence. Contemplation of the suffering face of Christ must also be an incentive to redouble the funds and programmes for lovingly accompanying and assisting all who are tried, and in particular those who are the victims of natural disasters, the poorest people, farmers, the sick and the afflicted, developing projects of solidarity and works of charity and mercy for them. Nor should you forget all the people who are obliged to emigrate from their homeland because they have lost their job or are making great efforts to find one; all those whose fundamental rights are trampled upon or who are forced to leave their home and abandon their family under the threat of the dark hand of terror and organized crime; or those who have fallen into the inauspicious net of trafficking in drugs or weapons. I would like to encourage you to

continue on this path of generous and brotherly service. It is not the result of human calculation but, rather, is born from love of God and one's neighbour, a source in which the Church finds the strength to complete her task, offering to others what she herself has learned from the sublime example of her divine Founder.

6. Dear Brothers in the Episcopate, if God's grace does not precede and support human beings they soon falter in their resolutions to transform the world. For this reason, so that the light that comes from on high may continue to make fruitful the prophetic and charitable work of the Church in Colombia, may you persevere in encouraging in the faithful a personal encounter with Jesus Christ so that they may not fail to pray and meditate with perseverance on the word of God. Encourage them to take part in a more dignified and fervent manner in the sacraments, celebrated in accordance with the canonical norms and liturgical books. All this will be an appropriate course and a suitable itinerary of Christian initiation. It will invite everyone to conversion and to holiness and will encourage the most necessary ecclesial renewal.

7. At the end of this meeting, I ask the Almighty to glorify in you the name of Our Lord Jesus, and to glorify you in him (cf. 2 Thess 1:12). As I entrust you to the protection of Our Lady of the Rosary of Chiquinquirá, heavenly Patroness of Colombia, I gladly impart to you the implored Apostolic Blessing, as a pledge of peace and joy in Jesus Christ, Redeemer of man.