



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS FRANCIS
TO THE BISHOPS OF THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE OF SWITZERLAND
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Monday, 1st December 2014

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate, Reverend Father Abbots,

I greet you with joy while you are making in these days your visit *ad limina Apostolorum*, a pilgrimage that I hope will be fraternal, enriching and fruitful for each one of you and for the Church in Switzerland. I thank you, Bishop Markus Büchel, for the words you addressed to me on behalf of everyone!

Switzerland is known as a country of peace, of cultural and confessional coexistence. It is the seat of important international institutions for peace, work, science and ecumenism. Although many inhabitants maintain a distance from the Church, the majority recognize the positive role Catholics and Protestants play in the social sphere: their charitable commitment brings a reflection of the Father's tenderness to the poor and the excluded. Your country has a long Christian tradition. Next year you will celebrate the Great Jubilee of the Abbey of St Maurice. It is an impressive testimony of 1,500 years of uninterrupted religious life, an exceptional fact in all of Europe. Dear Brothers, you have the great and beautiful responsibility of keeping the faith alive in your land. Without a living faith in the Risen Christ, the beautiful churches and monasteries would gradually become museums; all the laudable works and institutions would lose their spirit, leaving only empty places and abandoned people. The mission entrusted to you is to tend the flock, walking, according to circumstances, in front, in the middle or behind. The People of God cannot subsist without its Shepherds, Bishops and Priests; the Lord gave the Church the gift of apostolic succession "as a service to the unity of faith and its integral transmission" (*Lumen Fidei*, n. 49). It is a precious gift, with the collegiality which derives from it, if we know how to make it effective, to enhance it in order to support one another, to live by it and to lead those to whom the Lord sends us toward the encounter with the One who is "the way, and the truth, and the life" (cf. Jn 14:6). This way these people, especially the young generations, will be able to more easily find reasons to believe and to

hope.

I encourage you to sustain your formation programme for seminarians, on whom the future of the Church depends. She needs priests who, in addition to a sound familiarity with Tradition and the Magisterium, let themselves be met by Christ and, brought into conformity with Him, lead men in his footsteps (cf. Jn 1:40-42). To do this they will learn to remain ever more in his presence, receiving his Word, being nourished by the Eucharist, witnessing to the salvific value of the sacrament of reconciliation, and seeking their “Father’s house” (cf. Lk 2:49). In fraternal life they will find an effective support to face the temptation to withdraw into themselves or of a virtual life, as well as a permanent antidote to a sometimes acute loneliness. I invite you to also watch over your priests and to dedicate time to them, especially if they have distanced themselves and forgotten the meaning of episcopal paternity, or think they have no need of it. A humble, true and fraternal dialogue often gives a fresh start.

You have developed the necessary cooperation between priests and lay people. The mission of the laity in the Church is, indeed, of considerable importance, for the laity contributes to the life of the parishes and Christian communities, both in the professional field and as volunteers. It is important to acknowledge and support their commitment, while maintaining the clear distinction between the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial priesthood. On this point, I encourage you to continue the formation of the baptized, with regard to the truths of faith and to their meaning for liturgical, parish, family and social life and to choose formation staff with care. In this way you will enable lay people to truly integrate themselves into the Church, to take the place that awaits them there and to render fruitful the baptismal grace received, in order journey together towards holiness for the good of all.

The mission received from the Lord, also invites us to go to meet those with whom we come into contact, even if they differ from us in their culture, their religious confession or their belief. If we believe in the free and generous action of the Spirit, we are able to understand one another well and work together to serve society better, and to contribute to peace in a decisive way.

Ecumenism is a contribution not only to the unity of the Church, but also to the unity of the human family (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 245). It fosters fruitful, peaceful and fraternal coexistence. In prayer and in the common proclamation of the Lord Jesus, however, we must be careful to allow the faithful of each Christian confession to live its faith in a manner that is unequivocal and free of confusion, and without erasing the differences at the expense of truth. On the contrary, if, out of courtesy, we should hide our Eucharistic faith, we would not give sufficient importance either to our valuable legacy nor to our interlocutors. Likewise, the teaching of religion in schools must bear in mind the particularities of each confession.

I encourage you to voice clearly in unison society’s problems, at a time in which different people — even within the Church — are tempted to renounce the realism of the social aspect of the Gospel

(cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 88). The Gospel has its own original strength to make proposals. It is up to us to present it in its entirety, to render it accessible without clouding its beauty or weakening its attractiveness, in order to reach the people facing the difficulties of everyday life, who are searching for the meaning of their life or who have fallen away from the Church. Disillusioned or abandoned to themselves, they let themselves be tempted by arguments that deliberately deny the transcendent dimension of man, of life and of human relationships, particularly in the face of suffering and death. The testimony of Christians and parish communities can truly enlighten their path and support their aspiration for happiness. In this way the Church in Switzerland can more clearly be herself, the Body of Christ and the People of God, and not just a fine organization, another NGO.

Furthermore, it is important that relationships between the Church and the Cantons be pursued calmly. Their wealth lies in their special collaboration, as well as in the presence of Gospel values in the life of society and in civic choices. However, the specific nature of these relationships has called for reflection, which started several years ago, to preserve the diversity of functions of the civic entities and of the structures of the Catholic Church. The *Vademecum*, which is currently being put into practice, is another step on the path of clarification and peace. Although the modalities of application vary from one diocese to another, working together will help you to cooperate better with the cantonal institutions. When the Church avoids depending on institutions which, through economic means, may impose a lifestyle by no means consistent with Christ, who made Himself poor, the Church makes the Gospel more visible in her own structures.

Dear Brothers, the Church originates from Pentecost. At Pentecost, the Apostles went out and began to speak all languages, thus being able to manifest to all, by the power of the Holy Spirit, their living faith in the Risen Christ. The Redeemer invites us ever anew to preach the Gospel to all. The Good News must be proclaimed. It must not bow to the imaginations of men. We often grow tired of answering, without noticing that our interlocutors are not seeking answers. One must proclaim, go forward, ask questions with the ever valid apostolic vision: "This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses" (Acts 2:32).

I assure you of my prayers for you, for your priests and for your diocesan faithful. I hope that you cultivate God's field with zeal and patience, preserving the passion of truth, and I encourage you to all go forth together. Entrusting the future of the evangelization of your country to the Virgin Mary and to the intercession of St Nicholas of Flüe, St Maurice and his companions, I wholeheartedly impart the Apostolic Blessing; and please, I ask you fraternally not to forget to pray for me.