



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS
TO THE BISHOPS OF THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE OF EAST TIMOR
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Monday, 17 March 2014

Beloved Brothers in the Episcopate!

In the love of Christ, I cordially greet the whole Church of God in East Timor, which is represented here by you, her Pastors, who have come to “meet Peter” in the person of his Successor and to “submit for his consideration” your service on behalf of the Gospel (cf. Gal 1:18; 2:2). I thank Bishop Basílio of Baucau, President of Episcopal Conference, for the gracious words which he addressed to me on behalf of all of you, and which reveal the wonderful growth of your communities and their desire to be faithful to the Gospel.

I congratulate you because the seeds of the Good News of Jesus, planted in your land nearly 500 years ago, have grown and born fruit in a people that, over the last quarter of the 20th century and amid great trials, has decidedly and courageously professed their Catholic faith. The creation of the new Diocese of Maliana at the beginning of 2010, and the institution of the Timor Episcopal Conference at the end of 2011, are positive signs of the work which the Lord has begun among you and which he wishes to bring to completion (cf. Phil 1:6).

These signs express the Church’s rootedness in Timor and, at the same time, invite her sons and daughters to a lofty witness of Christian life and to a redoubling of their evangelizing efforts to bring the Good News to every strata of society, transforming it from within (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n. 18). Through your quinquennial reports and other information, I have been able to note the fraternal spirit which animates the people of Timor and its leaders in building a free, unified and just nation for all. In the years since your last *ad limina* visit — made in October 2002 — or just a few months after the long awaited and felicitous Independence of your country —, painful surprises have not been lacking, connected with the national consultation, while

the Church recalled the necessary foundations for a society that intends to be worthy of man and of his transcendent destiny. I am certain that you, with the priests, will continue to serve as a critical conscience for the nation, preserving to this end the required autonomy from political power in a balanced collaboration that entrusts it with the responsibility of ensuring the common good of society and promoting it.

In fact, the Church asks only one thing in the social sphere: the freedom to proclaim the Gospel in an integral way, even when it goes against the current, by defending the values she has received and to which she must remain ever faithful. And you, dear brothers, do not be afraid to offer the Church's contribution to the good of the whole of society. The words of the Second Vatican Council remind us well: "The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, these are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well. Nothing genuinely human fails to find an echo in their hearts" (Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 1). In truth, the heavenly Father, in sending his Son in the likeness of our flesh, has placed in us his bowels of mercy. And without mercy, today we have little possibility of inserting ourselves in a world of "the wounded" who are in need of understanding, forgiveness, and love. For this reason I never tire of inviting the whole Church to the "revolution of tenderness" (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 88). The agents of evangelization must be able to warm the hearts of people, to walk with them in the night, to discuss their illusions and disillusionments with them, to overcome their divisions. Without diminishing the value of the Gospel ideal we need to accompany, with mercy and patience, the different stages of people's growth which they build day after day. Therefore, in the Episcopal Conference's fraternal and united sharing, I repeatedly returned to this challenge of providing a solid formation for priests, religious and lay faithful. You place great hopes in your seminarians, novices, and indeed in the "Dom Jaime Garcia Goulart" Institute of Higher Studies in Philosophy and Theology; but do not cease to stir up and increase the disposition for solidarity also among the other local Churches, especially by mature seminarians to carry on their studies at ecclesiastical universities or — perhaps with greater benefit — by sending priests to obtain the most appropriate specializations needed for the various services of the ecclesial community of East Timor. There is a need for qualified formators and professors of theology, especially to strengthen the results that have already been achieved in the field of evangelization, thus enriching the Church with her "face of Timor".

Naturally we are not expecting the work of evangelization to be carried out only by professionals, while the rest of the faithful simply remain passive recipients. On the contrary, we must make every Christian an active agent. "[A]nyone who has truly experienced God's saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love. Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus" (*ibid.*, n. 120). And if a person has welcomed this love that gives the meaning to his life, he cannot contain the desire to communicate it to others. This is the source of the work of evangelization. The believing heart knows that life is not the same without Jesus. Well! What he has discovered, what

helps him to live and gives him hope, he has to communicate to others. As we know, beloved brothers, in all of the baptized — from the first to the last — the Holy Spirit is acting, spurring people to evangelization. This “presence of the Spirit gives Christians a certain connaturality with divine realities, and a wisdom which enables them to grasp those realities intuitively, even when they lack the wherewithal to give them precise expression” (*ibid.*, n. 119). Due to linguistic limitations we see emerge the need to evangelize cultures to inculturate the Gospel, for as [John Paul II](#) wrote, “a faith that does not become culture is a faith not fully received, entirely thought out, or faithfully lived” (*Letter on the occasion of the Foundation of the Pontifical Council for Culture*, 20 May 1982, n. 2). If, in the various cultural contexts of East Timor, the faith and evangelization are not able to speak of God, to proclaim Christ’s victory over the tragedy of the human condition, of opening opportunities for the Spirit who renews all things, it is because they are not sufficiently alive in the Christian faithful, who need a journey of formation and maturation. This “entails taking seriously each person and God’s plan for his or her life. All of us need to grow in Christ. Evangelization should stimulate a desire for this growth, so that each of us can say wholeheartedly: ‘It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me’ (Gal 2:20)” (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 160).

And, if he lives in the believer, Christ will open the pages of God’s plan yet sealed in local cultures, by making other forms of expression appear, the most eloquent signs, words filled with new meaning. The Book of Revelation (cf. 5:1-10) contains a page that serves as an illustration: it speaks of a scroll sealed with seven seals, which only Christ is able to open: He is the Immolated Lamb who by his blood has redeemed for God men of every tribe, language, people and nation. East Timor, Heaven has redeemed you, that you may open yourself up to Heaven. All this involves a number of challenges in order to allow an easier understanding of the Word of God and a better reception of the Sacraments. But a challenge is not a threat. The missionary consciousness today is expected to have the value of humble dialogue and the firm conviction that one is presenting a proposal for a human fullness in our cultural context.

Beloved brothers in the episcopate, I wanted to limit myself to three points, the object of your concerns; the first is your contribution as a critical conscience for the nation; the second is the entire Church that, moved by the bowels of mercy, sets out on mission; the third is the expression of the Good News of salvation in the local languages. I believe I can sum up everything in an image that is familiar and beloved to you: the faithful on pilgrimage to Marian shrines, under the guidance of the Bishop (I say “guide”, which is not synonymous with command, dominate). And the place of the bishop can be threefold: in front, to indicate the path to his people; in the middle to keep them united and to dispel dismay; or behind, to prevent any from lingering behind or turning away, but basically because the flock has a sense of smell to find new paths: sensitivity for the faith. In any case, be men capable of supporting, with love and patience, the steps of God among his people and hold in high esteem everything that keeps them united, by keeping guard against possible dangers, but especially by increasing hope: that there may only be sun and light in their hearts!

As I thank you all for the efforts you have accomplished at the service of the Gospel, I ask the people of Timor to pray for me; I entrust them to the protection of the Immaculate Conception — who is affectionately invoked under the title of *Virgem da Aitara* — and through her intercession I implore for you, for the priests, religious, seminarians, novices, catechists, leaders of ecclesial movements and the high spirited youth, for families with their children and elderly, and for all other members of the People of God, an abundance of graces from Heaven, and as a pledge I impart to you the Apostolic Blessing.