



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO CHILE AND PERU

(15-22 JANUARY 2018)

MEETING WITH THE BISHOPS

GREETING OF THE HOLY FATHER

Santiago Cathedral Sacristy

Tuesday, 16 January 2018

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers:

I thank you for the greeting that the President of the Conference has offered to me in the name of all present.

Before all else, I would like to greet Bishop Bernardino Piñero Carvallo, who this year celebrates his sixtieth anniversary of episcopal ordination – he is the oldest bishop in the world, not only in age but also in years of episcopate – who was present for four sessions of the Second Vatican Council. A marvellous living memory.

Soon a year will have passed since your *ad limina* visit. Now it is my turn to come and visit you. I am pleased that our meeting follows that with our consecrated men and women, for one of our principal tasks is precisely *to be close* to consecrated life and to our priests. If the shepherd wanders off, the sheep too will stray and fall prey to any wolf that comes along. The fatherhood of the bishop with his priests, with his presbyterate! A fatherhood that neither paternalism nor authoritarianism, but a gift to be sought. Stay close to your priests, like Saint Joseph, with a fatherhood that helps them to grow and to develop the charisms that the Holy Spirit has wished to

pour out upon your respective presbyterates.

I know that ours was meant to be a brief meeting, since we already discussed a great deal in the two extensive sessions we had during the *ad limina* visit. But I would like to reiterate some of the points I made during our meeting in Rome. I can sum them up in the following phrase: the consciousness of being a people, of being the People of God.

One of the problems facing our societies today is the sense of being orphaned, of not belonging to anyone. This “postmodern” feeling can seep into us and into our clergy. We begin to think that we belong to no one; we forget that we are part of God’s holy and faithful people and that the Church is not, nor will it ever be, an élite of consecrated men and women, priests and bishops. Without this consciousness of being a people, we are not able to sustain our life, our vocation and our ministry. To forget this – as I said to the Commission for Latin America – “carries many risks and distortions in our own experience, as individuals and in community, of the ministry that the Church has entrusted to us”.^[1] The lack of consciousness of belonging to God’s faithful people as servants, and not masters, can lead us to one of the temptations that is most damaging to the missionary outreach that we are called to promote: clericalism, which ends up as a caricature of the vocation we have received.

A failure to realize that the mission belongs to the entire Church, and not to the individual priest or bishop, limits the horizon, and even worse, stifles all the initiatives that the Spirit may be awakening in our midst. Let us be clear about this. The laypersons are not our peons, or our employees. They don’t have to parrot back whatever we say. “Clericalism, far from giving impetus to various contributions and proposals, gradually extinguishes the prophetic flame to which the entire Church is called to bear witness. Clericalism forgets that the visibility and the sacramentality of the Church belong to all the faithful people of God (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 9-14), not only to the few chosen and enlightened”.^[2]

Let us be on guard, please, against this temptation, especially in seminaries and throughout the process of formation. I must confess, I am concerned about the formation of seminarians, that they be pastors at the service of the People of God; as a pastor should be, through the means of doctrine, discipline, the sacraments, by being close to the people, through works of charity, but also with the awareness that they are the People of God. Seminaries must stress that future priests be capable of serving God’s holy and faithful people, acknowledging the diversity of cultures and renouncing the temptation to any form of clericalism. The priest is a minister of Jesus Christ: Jesus is the protagonist who makes himself present in the entire people of God.

Tomorrow’s priests must be trained with a view to the future, since their ministry will be carried out in a secularized world. This in turn demands that we pastors discern how best to prepare them for carrying out their mission in these concrete circumstances and not in our “ideal worlds or situations”. Their mission is carried out in fraternal unity with the whole People of God. Side by side, supporting and encouraging the laity in a climate of discernment and synodality, two of the

essential features of the priest of tomorrow. Let us say no to clericalism and to ideal worlds that are only part of our thinking, but touch the life of no one.

And in this regard, to implore from the Holy Spirit the gift of dreaming. Please do not stop dreaming, dreaming and working for a missionary and prophetic option capable of transforming everything, so that our customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and ecclesial structures can be suitably channelled for the evangelization of Chile rather than for ecclesiastical self-preservation. Let us not be afraid to strip ourselves of everything that separates us from the missionary mandate.^[3]

Dear brothers, this is the summary I wanted to offer you from our discussions during the *ad limina* visit. Let us commend ourselves to the protection of Mary, Mother of Chile. Let us pray together for our presbyterates and for our consecrated men and women. Let us pray for God's holy and faithful people, of which we are a part. Thank you!

[1] *Letter to Cardinal Marc Ouellet, President of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America (21 March 2016)*.

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] Cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 27.