



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO AMERICAN BISHOPS
TAKING PART IN THE SEMINAR ON MORAL THEOLOGY**

To my brother Bishops from North and Central America and the Caribbean

It is a particular joy for me to greet you as you gather to reflect once again on the mystery of life in Christ Jesus. I know that the great generosity of the Knights of Columbus has made it possible for so many of you to come together to listen, to share, and to ponder the riches of life lived in the grace of God. This opportunity, provided by the "Pope John XXIII Center", is very rare, not only because you all have such demanding schedules, but also because you are separated by such great distances from one another. My hope is that you will value this time you have together for the special occasion it is. What you are doing here will not be time taken away from your ministry, but time spent to strengthen it, since as Bishops you have been called to teach, to sanctify and to govern. You can do no better than to give of your time and energy this week to discern more clearly what the Spirit of Jesus is teaching in the Church. Your understanding of that teaching will directly affect your leadership in the community of faith: that leadership, by the Lord's own will and strength, will bring his people closer to him, thus making them the holy people they have been called to be.

In the course of the next few days, you will study various issues in the wide field of moral theology. The multiple problems of today's world, seen with ever greater urgency through modern means of communication, will surely receive the attention they deserve, and I shall not try to list them here. Nevertheless, I would like to offer you a context within which, and by means of which, you will be able to penetrate the sometimes dark cloud which has from time to time obscured the Church's teachings in the area of morality and Christian living. That context is none other than the person of the Lord Jesus himself, who said: "I am the way, the truth and the life" (Gv. 14, 6). His words are both a fact and a promise: not only does he represent the sole path to eternal life, but he pledges us his own grace, the fruit of the Redemption, that perennial power released into the world by his Cross and Resurrection. We should never fail to consider this grace of his: it is the only hope we have. Jesus is also the truth: not a dry, sterile sort of truth, but a *person*, present just as truly in our world as he was in the world of two thousand years ago. When we study moral theology, we ask: "What difference does Jesus make in our lives?"

And Jesus is life. The facts of his own historical existence make more and more clear this central fact: life in Christ Jesus

is life directed by and toward holiness, because God, the source and goal of all life, is holy. In a deep sense, then, it can be said, it *must* be said: the Church is for life! Her Magisterium is a living and active reality. In the members of the Church, joined by one faith, sustained by hope, and living in love, it is the Lord Jesus himself who is alive in the world. Through the Gospel the Church preaches life and in the sacraments she celebrates life: the Church is alive in the Lord!

It is no wonder, then, that human life, in all the richness of its existence, is cherished by the Church as the sacred reality it is. Your study of moral theology will deepen your appreciation of life. When, by your ministry in the local churches entrusted to your pastoral care, you lead your people to honour, to defend, to choose life in all its dimensions, you will be bringing them to an ever closer relationship with the triune God, who is the eternal community of life and love. In doing this for your people, be assured that you can serve them in no better way. Through your pastoral ministry you can communicate nothing more precious than a sharing in the life of the Most Holy Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, to whom be glory and honour for ever and ever.

From the Vatican, January 25, 1984.

IOANNES PAULUS PP. II

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