



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS OF CANADA
ON THEIR «AD LIMINA APOSTOLORUM» VISIT**

Thursday, 28 April 1983

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

1. Your *ad limina* visit is an event which we are living and celebrating together, in the charity of Christ and in the unity of his Church. This visit gives us the opportunity *to reflect together on the ministry that is yours as Bishops*, as pastors of God's people in Ontario, in the Military Vicariate and in the Eparchy of Saints Cyril and Methodius of Toronto.

But even more it is an opportunity for us *to offer to Jesus Christ* "the Chief Shepherd" (1 Petr. 5, 4) of the Church, all the pastoral efforts, initiatives and endeavours that are performed in his name, in obedience to his will, and through the sacred charism of the Episcopate. Your *ad Limina* visit is the occasion for rendering pastoral accountability to Jesus Christ, for renewing your love for him and his Church, and for placing fresh trust and confidence in the immense sanctifying power of his Paschal Mystery. It is also the occasion for me, as your Brother in the Episcopal College, as the Successor of Peter, to offer you a word of encouragement, understanding and fraternal love - indeed, to confirm you in your profession and teaching of the Catholic faith.

2. I also wish to bear witness at this time *to what has been achieved in your local Churches*. Certainly, the power of the Gospel has been at work in the hearts of the faithful and has sustained you and your priests and deacons in generous pastoral zeal. Even though, in all realism, we must admit that the obstacles to Christian living in today's world are formidable, we still proclaim that the saving grace of Christ is much more powerful than sin and human weakness (Cfr. Rom. 5, 20).

I am grateful to you and to your people for everything you have done to live the Gospel, to transmit it in all its purity and power to the young people, and to provide for its transmission to future

generations. With great effort you have dedicated *special attention to Catholic education and to Catholic Schools* at the various levels. All of this has a direct and important bearing on the faith of God's people and deserves your continued pastoral vigilance and involvement.

It is a credit to the grace of Christ, to your zeal and to the commitment of your people how you have worked to foster *a sense of shared responsibility* among the faithful. This sense of shared responsibility among the faithful, manifested in a personal sense of ecclesial mission, is undoubtedly one of the greatest blessings that has come to the Church through the Second Vatican Council.

In so many important projects you have worked together, as a united ecclesial community, to proclaim Gospel values, to defend human dignity and to build up the Kingdom of God on earth. All your concerted efforts made in the *Pro-life area* against whatever wounds, weakens or destroys life are truly worthy of praise and support. Your willingness to welcome *immigrants* to your land and to assist them in their new life is one of many authentic expressions of your Christian charity. The exercise of your pastoral responsibility for *promoting vocations* and in training candidates for the priesthood and religious life according to the Magisterium of the Church is a matter of extreme importance for the life of your local Churches. Your desire to foster *ecumenism* according to the conciliar directives and in union with the universal Church, as well as your pastoral commitment to promote *lay movements of the apostolate* and to provide for *the pastoral care of the young people* - all these are but aspects of *your single goal* to proclaim the Good News of salvation and to announce to everyone "the unsearchable riches of Christ" (*Eph. 3, 8*).

3. The apostolate of the Church is varied and there are many different approaches to it. The Church is called upon to render manifold service in the name of Jesus Christ. Today I would limit myself to proposing to your pastoral reflection, in the light of the last Synod of Bishops, a few considerations on *the Church at the service of the family*. Precisely because "the future of humanity passes by way of the family" (IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Familiaris Consortio*, 86), we are deeply convinced, as pastors, of the need to defend the family, to assist it, to encourage it; we are deeply convinced of the need to proclaim the vocation and mission of the family in the modern world.

In my Apostolic Exhortation on the Family I emphasized a particular aspect of the family's role in the world, stating that "the family has the mission *to guard, reveal and communicate love*" (*Ibid.* 12). This mission is intimately related to the central message of revelation, which is the great fact that God loves his people and has sent his Son to redeem them. In the words of Jesus: "God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son . . . not to condemn the world, but so that through him the world might be saved" (*Jo. 3, 16-17*).

As Bishops we are not able to make the obstacles to Christian living disappear; we are not in a position to lift all the burdens that weigh upon our Christian families; and much less are we

authorized to attempt to remove the Cross from Christianity. But we are in a position *to proclaim the great dignity of marriage*, its identity as an image and symbol and expression of God's everlasting and unbreakable covenant of love with his Church. We are able to love the family and in this pastoral love to offer it the only criterion for the real solution to the problems that it faces. *This criterion is the word of God*: the word of God in all its purity and power, in all its integrity and with all its demands - the word of God as transmitted by the Church.

The proclamation of *the Good News of God's love reflected in conjugal love and married life is one of the greatest contributions we can make to our people*, one of the best ways we can show them our total support, and help them to live the Sacrament of Marriage. With sacramental grace married couples are able to understand their dignity and they are prepared to make serious efforts to live their mission "to guard, reveal and communicate love". But all of this presupposes that the Church continues steadfastly to speak to the Christian family, in the name of Jesus, constantly manifesting the family's true identity according to the Lord's plan, which is revealed in Sacred Scripture and Tradition and attested to by the Holy Spirit through the Magisterium of the Church.

4. As pastors we have *a ministry of love to fulfill towards the family* and this ministry of love expresses itself in prayer, support, encouragement and service. It means constantly proclaiming the truth of God's plan for marriage, as long as the Lord gives us strength to preach. I also mentioned in my Apostolic Exhortation that "loving the family means identifying the dangers and evils that menace it, in order to overcome them. Loving the family means endeavoring to create for it an environment favourable for its development" (IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Familiaris Consortio*, 86). All of this is a personal program for the hierarchy, but one in which all sectors of the People of God can make a magnificent contribution.

Precisely in the context of the family's mission "to guard, reveal and communicate love", we Bishops are constantly called upon to present as clearly and faithfully and effectively as possible *the Church's teaching on marriage as a community of life and love, an indivisible unity, and an indissoluble communion*. And it is up to us to solicit and encourage the collaboration of the whole Church - and also the contribution of other men and women of good will - to support the family in its daily pilgrimage to the Father, to assist it in its problems and to sustain it in its Christian convictions.

This concerted effort has been amply shown and deserves to be encouraged even more in the question of lawful birth regulation. As I mentioned in *Familiaris Consortio*, the Church notes with satisfaction the results already achieved by scientific research, but feels compelled "to call with new vigour on the responsibility of all - doctors, experts, marriage counsellors, teachers and married couples - who can actually help married people to live their love with respect for the structure and finalities of the conjugal act which expresses that love" (IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Familiaris Consortio*, 35). From the pastoral point of view, the personal attention that Bishops devote to assisting couples who are endeavouring to live their human and Christian vocation of

married love to the full deserves the profound gratitude and praise of the universal Church. The zeal of the Bishop will always elicit the collaboration and confidence of the ecclesial community.

5. Beaucoup d'autres aspects de la famille requièrent le soutien des évêques et de toute la communauté ecclésiale. Parmi eux il y a *la mission et le ministère du couple dans l'éducation de leurs enfants* afin qu'ils parviennent à une pleine maturité humaine et chrétienne. Ici encore, il s'agit, pour nous évêques, de proclamer l'identité et la dignité de la vie dans le mariage chrétien. Dans la force de l'Esprit Saint, nous devons aussi éveiller une confiance et une certitude nouvelles dans le peuple confié à nos soins, afin qu'il réalise en lui la grandeur de l'amour conjugal. Nous ne devons pas nous laisser de proclamer que "le mariage chrétien . . . est en lui-même un acte liturgique de glorification de Dieu dans le Christ Jésus et dans l'Eglise" (*Ibid.* 56).

Enfin, c'est à *travers la prière* - la prière familiale et celle de toute l'Eglise - *que le renouveau du mariage chrétien s'effectuera*, et avec lui, pour une grande part, le renouveau, la conversion et l'évangélisation du monde.

Chers et vénérés Frères dans l'épiscopat, plaçons fermement notre confiance dans la puissance du Seigneur ressuscité pour fortifier l'alliance de l'amour conjugal dans cette génération de l'Eglise. Et unissons tous nos efforts pour proclamer de façon toujours plus efficace que cet amour a été racheté, que le mariage chrétien est vraiment *le plan du Seigneur pour l'accomplissement de l'homme* et que la famille est pour Dieu la façon particulière "de garder, révéler et communiquer l'amour".

Puisse Marie, la mère de Jésus, vous assister dans votre ministère pastoral au service de la famille et emplir vos cœurs de joie profonde et de paix! A travers vous, j'adresse mon salut à tous les fidèles de vos Eglises locales, à votre clergé, aux religieux et aux laïcs, et, en particulier, aux familles chrétiennes. Je bénis spécialement les malades et ceux qui souffrent, et j'assure ceux qui connaissent la solitude de ma proximité dans la prière. A toutes les communautés ecclésiales dont vous êtes les serviteurs, les pasteurs et les messagers de paix, je dis mon affection en Jésus-Christ notre Sauveur!

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