



The Holy See

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

Friday, 23 September 1983

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

1. We have gathered here today as Bishops *to celebrate our faith in Jesus Christ*, the Son of God and Saviour of the world. We have assembled under the sign of faith, and it is in the context of faith that we are experiencing collegiality. It is also in the context of faith that we penetrate and live the vital mystery of the Church, which is truly present in all the ecclesial communities of Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick.

United with you, the local shepherds of God's people, in the bonds of Christ's love, I pay homage to all your Dioceses. They are rooted of course in the Apostolic Tradition, but they also enjoy a local stability that, in the case of Saint John's, Newfoundland, now goes back two full centuries. Yours are ecclesial communities that are striving earnestly to live the Gospel, failing at times and suffering, undergoing purification, but living "by faith in the Son of God" (*Gal. 2, 20*). With you I render thanks to the grace of God, praising the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the action of Holy Spirit that has brought the fruits of the Redemption into the hearts of the faithful, and has kept alive in your midst worthy practices of piety and faith.

In a word, with you *I offer thanks for the gift of faith* in Jesus Christ that has been infused into the hearts of those whom you are called to serve, for the hope that is enkindled by this faith—a hope that gives such meaning to Christian living—and for the works of that love which springs from faith and fulfills the law of God.

2. As we share together sentiments of respect and reverence for the Catholic history of your people, we realize the challenge that is ours as servants pastors, to lead the way into the future,

encouraging and *calling the faithful to conversion*.

I thank you for all that you have done, despite many difficulties and obstacles, in the context of the faith and through love and fidelity, as shepherds of God's people, holding a sacred trust. *The achievements of your local Churches* are many because the Eucharist maintains its honoured place as "the center and culmination of the whole life of the Christian community" (*Christus Dominus*, 30). The other many aspects of vitality include countless expressions of *the charity of Christ* towards the poor and towards all those in spiritual and material need. The transmission of the Catholic faith through numerous *catechetical efforts* has brought honour to generations of your priests, religious and laity, especially Catholic parents.

In the transmission of the faith, so many aspects have had to be the object of your attention and pastoral care. I cannot mention them all, but you will recognize the accomplishments of your local Churches in the issues to which I shall just allude. The promotion of *Catholic education and evangelization* has been providentially emphasized as priorities in a number of your Dioceses, and they must remain priorities for years to come. In many places the zeal of your people has been manifested through strong parish life, through the *Catholic School*, through a variety of *associations*, organizations and movements that have contributed greatly to the vitality of your people's faith. Efforts have been made to foster *Christian unity*, to promote *vocations* and to uphold the dignity of *marriage* and the Christian family. About this topic I had the occasion to speak last April to a group of your brother Bishops from Ontario.

3. In this hour of collegial unity I would like to emphasize a few aspects of Catholic life which are extremely relevant to the well-being of your local Churches, and therefore affect your pastoral activity and collegial collaboration.

The ministry that is ours as pastors of God's people is a *ministry of faith* from which all justification takes its origin. We are called upon to support *the faith infused* into our people's hearts at Baptism by preaching to them *the content of the faith*. Our message of revealed faith is the response we give to the challenges of the modern world, which include secularism, materialism and hedonism. The temptations and difficulties experienced by our people and the obstacles to their Christian living are very great, but *greater still is the faith that they have received by hearing the preaching of Christ* (Cfr. *Rom.* 10, 17). Faith is so great that Saint John does not hesitate to state: "This is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" (*1 Jo.* 4, 4-5).

It is precisely in order to communicate this victory and to permit its power to enter the lives of the faithful that we are called upon *to speak to our people about God*. We are called to preach the primacy of God, to present him as *the Creator and Lord of life*. We must never grow tired of proclaiming to our people *the mystery of the Most Holy Trinity*: how God is a Father who reveals himself in his Son, who is "the reflection of the Father's glory, the exact representation of the

Father's being" (*Hebr.* 1, 3), and how, in the name of his Son, the Father sends the Holy Spirit to be with us for ever (*Cfr. Io.* 14, 16. 25). Through the action of the Holy Spirit, God's people are united in the communion of the Church and are enabled to share sacramentally in Christ's Paschal victory. As Bishops we are called to proclaim over and over again the mystery of faith, which is a *mystery of salvation in Jesus Christ*, the Incarnate Word.

4. Being conscious of the needs of our people before God, we realize that we must teach them to pray and pray with them. *Our ministry of faith is therefore a ministry of prayer.* We ourselves are never more closely conformed to Jesus Christ the Good Shepherd than when we lead our people in prayer, especially in the Church's liturgical prayer. Above all, in the Eucharistic Sacrifice, the Church actuates her identity as a praying community, and Jesus Christ offers his Church to his Father.

As Bishops we can never stress enough the importance of prayer in the life of the Church. And as Bishops we can never devote enough time and energy to prayer ourselves; nor can we ever encourage our people enough in this activity that is such an essential part of Christian living. Since the mystery of Christ in his Church is incomplete without prayer, *the call to prayer* can never be separated from the mission of the Bishop, through whom Jesus desires to repeat the words: "Watch and pray" (*Marc.* 14, 38).

5. To a very special degree there is a need throughout the Church today - and a number of you, I believe, experience this need in a particular way in your own dioceses - *to pray and work for vocations* to the priesthood. That profound ecclesial renewal envisioned by the Second Vatican Council can never adequately take place if the local Churches do not have a sufficient number of worthy and holy priests. *The building of community* in the Church is intimately linked to the power that derives from the celebration of *the Eucharistic Sacrifice*, and this in turn is impossible without the priesthood. At the core, too, of the Christian life and mission of the laity is the Eucharist, together with the conversion that it presupposes and requires; and this conversion is linked to *the Sacrament of Penance* and hence to *the ministerial priesthood* of the Church. In every aspect of their ministry, priests exist for the Church, and they are so necessary to both the laity and the religious that, without them, all the faithful are impeded in realizing the fullness of their Christian vocation. The entire life of the Church is bound up with the priesthood, which remains a great gift of God to individuals for the well-being of all.

This gift of God must be sought and it must be sought *in prayer*. A vocation to the priesthood is so important that it is given personally by God to individuals. It is a question of a divine call which is transmitted and authenticated by the Church and remains an invitation that does no violence to human freedom. The acceptance of a vocation to the priesthood, perseverance in the priesthood and the fruitfulness of priestly activity all depend on the action of God, and need his grace. Christ himself sets the whole question in its proper perspective when he says: "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his

harvest" (*Luc. 10, 2*).

Venerable and dear Brothers, here we see *our role* as pastors: to pray and to lead our people in prayer for vocations. But as pastors and "servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God" (*1 Cor. 4, 1*), it is up to us *to call the young* to be attentive to the voice of the Lord. By announcing the word of God to the young, by extolling the mystery of the priesthood, and by proclaiming the divine call to the priesthood, we shall prepare the way for the action of the Holy Spirit on individual hearts. *This pastoral action is all part of the proclamation of the Gospel message*, a part of living the mystery of Christ in his Church. The young people must hear about the call of Christ, so as to be in a position to accept it when it comes. They must know that it is directed to a ministry that has been instituted by Christ, that depends on his will, and that demands immense generosity and love, as well a life that is to be lived in union with Christ. In the very act of proclaiming this call of Christ and of explaining its meaning and requirements, the Gospel message is being preached and the dynamic process of salvation is being actuated. The very word of God is operating in human hearts through the instrumentality of the pastors of the Church.

For this reason *we must continue to call*, to proclaim and to preach vocations. The Lord of the harvest is ready to listen. God will not abandon his Church. But the Bishops must send forth the call of the Lord and do so perseveringly. And *each local Church* in its entirety must support this action through prayer and penance. The vital proclamation of the word of God cannot remain without results. In speaking of his word, God says: "It shall not return to me void, but shall do my will, achieving the end for which I sent it" (*Is. 55, 11*).

6. Chers Frères, il y a bien d'autres aspects importants de la Parole de Dieu qui *se rattachent en profondeur à la foi de votre peuple*. S'il plaît à Dieu, j'aurai l'occasion de m'exprimer sur plusieurs d'entre eux avec vos Frères Evêques, lors d'autres visites *ad Limina* et au cours de ma visite pastorale au Canada l'an prochain. Pour le moment, cependant, je ne voudrais ajouter qu'une autre pensée.

Tandis que nous nous préparons à ce voyage, je voudrais demander *qu'un appel* soit lancé par vous et tous vos Frères Evêques, au nom du Christ et de l'Eglise, en mon nom et au votre, pour inviter les fidèles du Canada à *la conversion et à la confession personnelle*. Pour certains, cela voudra dire faire l'expérience de la joie du pardon sacramentel pour la première fois depuis bien des années; pour tous, ce sera la grâce d'être appelés à répondre dans la foi à ce que demande la Parole de Dieu. L'appel à la conversion est aussi un appel à la générosité et à la paix; c'est appeler à accueillir la miséricorde et l'amour de Jésus-Christ. C'est appeler à préparer les voies "pour célébrer notre foi".

Je recommande cette tâche collégiale et votre zèle dans toutes vos activités pastorales à la Mère de Jésus, Reine des Apôtres. Qu'elle vous soutienne dans le *ministère de la foi* et dans le *ministère de la prière*. Et qu'elle soit pour vous tous source de joie et gage de paix.

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