



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS FROM PAPUA NEW GUINEA AND
THE SOLOMON ISLANDS ON THEIR «AD LIMINA» VISIT**

Saturday, 29 October 1988

Dear brother Bishops,

1. I cordially welcome you to Rome on the occasion of your ad Limina visit. I am confident that your prayers at the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul and your fraternal encounter with the Successor of Peter will serve to deepen the mystery of communion that is the Church. You have come from afar in order to bear witness to the unity of the body of Christ and to strengthen that "solicitude for the whole Church", which is our special responsibility within the College of Bishops. At the same time, as pastors of your local Churches, you bring a rich diversity of culture and experience to the Church universal.

Through you, I wish to greet all the clergy, religious and laity of Papua New Guinea and of the Solomon Islands and to confirm them in their faith. I recall with joy and thanksgiving my pastoral visit in 1984, at which time I witnessed personally the deep spirit of faith, hope and love with which your Churches are blessed. Today I make my own the words of Saint Paul to the Colossians: "We have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, to lead a life worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good word and increasing in the knowledge of God". These words reveal the dynamism of your life in Christ: the People of God in Papua New Guinea and in the Solomon Islands are filled with the gifts of the Spirit so that they may bear fruit ever more abundantly on this our earthly pilgrimage.

2. I wish to reflect with you briefly today on some aspects of the Church's life in your Dioceses. As I mentioned during my pastoral visit, the foundations of your ecclesial life were established by courageous and dedicated missionaries who left behind home and country in order to bring Christ to those who had not heard the Gospel. We give thanks to God for those who brought the new life of grace to your islands. Some of you and many of your clergy and religious are likewise members

of missionary Congregations. You have become one with your people in a true bond of love, and have eagerly sought to make your home with them, so that, as Saint Paul says, they may “bear fruit in every good work and increase in the knowledge of God”. I know that you face difficulties in ministering to communities that are widely scattered and often isolated from one another, communities that lack the personnel and financial resources necessary for all that needs to be done.

Yet all of you, both missionary bishops and bishops given by the local Churches, are carrying out a great work of evangelization marked by unity and zeal, for which I wish to commend you and to thank you on behalf of the whole Church.

At the same time it is only natural that with the passing of years the need for indigenous bishops, priests and religious will increase as the faith deepens its roots and the people of your islands seek an ever greater responsibility for themselves and for their local Churches. I encourage you to continue your efforts to ensure the blossoming of vocations to the priesthood and religious life, and the solid spiritual, intellectual and pastoral formation of the young people who will play an ever greater role in your dioceses as the bishops, priests and religious of the future.

3. One of the great blessings of the Second Vatican Council is our renewed awareness of the laity’s role in the life and mission of the Church. This also involves another issue of fundamental importance, namely, the relationship of the Church to the world. The Council says that “the People of God believes itself to be led by the Spirit of the Lord who fills the whole world. Moved by that faith, it strives to discern in the events, the needs and the longings which it shares with the people of our time, those things that are authentic signs of God’s presence or of his plan. For faith throws new light on all things and makes known the divine will for man’s integral vocation, thus guiding the mind towards solutions that are fully human”.

“Faith throws new light on all things”: every form of authentic Christian living, in all its diversity, is a participation in the Church’s one mission to be a sacrament of salvation in and for the world. The laity work for the evangelization and sanctification of others by the way that they are present and active in the midst of everyday life, both in private and in public. They illuminate and order human society and all temporal realities so that they may be renewed by Christ and transformed in accordance with God’s plan.

In Papua New Guinea and in the Solomon Islands, and throughout the Church, there are many ways in which lay people can fulfill this mission, especially by their witness to the Gospel in social, economic, political and cultural life. Special mention must be made of the contribution of those who are associated directly in the Church’s ministry in areas such as catechesis, education, social work and charitable assistance. And there is that most basic Christian witness which the laity are called to give in relation to marriage and family life. As Christians we believe that in Christ God has confirmed, purified and elevated the call to communion, and has perfected marriage as a

sacrament of redemption. In Christ the Bridegroom, marriage becomes a living sign of the unity which makes the Church his body, and of the fullness of love that is found in God alone. Christian marriage and family life are the threshold by which new human beings enter both the human race and the household of faith. Both parents and children learn from one another how to live and act as human beings within a human community. The seeds of faith and of love for God are planted and nourished within this “domestic church”.

4. Dear brothers, we who have been called by the Good Shepherd to pasture the flock entrusted to our care have the responsibility of leading guiding and encouraging our people in Christian living.

We must do everything possible to promote an ever deeper spiritual and doctrinal formation among the laity so that they can be effective witnesses to the Gospel within the society of which they are a part. This includes a particular concern on our part to uphold the Church’s teaching on the sanctity of marriage and the family through pastoral initiatives that support married couples at every stage of their life together. Our attention is especially needed by those in difficult or irregular situations due to divorce or other problems. It is my conviction that the pastoral care of the family is of utmost importance, because the future of evangelization depends largely on the “domestic church”.

5. The fostering of marriage and family life which I have mentioned is intimately joined to the Church’s defence of the inalienable rights of every human person created in the image and likeness of God. She cannot fail to condemn crimes against life itself, such as murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia, and wilful suicide; all violations of the integrity of the human person, such as physical and mental torture, undue psychological pressures, the deprivation of religious liberty and of freedom of conscience; all offences against human dignity, such as racial discrimination, subhuman living and working conditions, arbitrary treatment under the law, and every form of exploitation for economic or other purposes. The defence of the human person also requires a positive effort on the part of the Church to promote authentic human development by word and example. She does this especially when her own members give generously of themselves and of what they have for the sake of others out of love for the common good, and follow the path of forgiveness rather than that of hatred and violence when they are wronged.

In bringing the Gospel to bear on their own lives and the life of society, Christ’s faithful in Papua New Guinea and in the Solomon Islands look to you, dear brothers, for leadership and inspiration in finding “solutions that are fully human” because they are rooted in “the divine will for man’s integral vocation”. You give this leadership and inspiration not only as individual pastors, but also when you act together in order to preserve and promote Catholic teaching or apply that teaching to concrete situations. I would encourage you to pursue this through the publication, on both the diocesan and national levels, of pastoral letters and statements like the one on religious freedom, which I have mentioned. Use should also be made of the mass media in making known the Church’s position on problems of the day. In this way the religious and moral dimension, which is

essential for building up a more just and peaceful society, will not be lacking. By persevering along this path, you will fulfill the admonition of the Second Letter to Timothy: "Preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season, convince, rebuke and exhort, be unfailing in patience and in teaching.

6. Christian witness to the Gospel also touches other Christians and all people of good will. I know that there is an ecumenical dimension to the life of your local Churches which is readily embraced and accepted. We can give thanks to God for every effort to understand better the faith of our non-Catholic brothers and sisters and to collaborate with them in a true spirit of love. In this way we hope to grow together with them along the path of unity. A true spirit of ecumenism also challenges us to grow in love and understanding of our own Catholic faith. Otherwise we may be tempted to brush aside serious doctrinal, disciplinary and historical differences, and our efforts will remain superficial and sterile because they fail to get to the roots of division. I am confident that by deepening their knowledge and appreciation of their own faith in the search for better understanding of the faith of others, the Catholic people of your islands can make an important contribution to the great ecumenical task to which the Church is so firmly committed.

7. Dear brothers, may each of your local Churches always be a sign of loving Christian communion, a beacon of hope for all who seek truly human solutions to the problems that beset individuals and society, a source of encouragement to all those who strive to conduct their lives in accordance with the will of God for our salvation. May the People of God in Papua New Guinea and in the Solomon Islands lead the societies of which they are a part to an ever deeper realization that human fulfillment and happiness are to be found in God and in his plan for us, which is one of love and mercy for all the sons and daughters of the human race. On this joyful occasion, I invoke upon you and your people the strength and peace that come from on high, and I cordially impart to you my Apostolic Blessing.

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