



# The Holy See

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## **ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II TO THE BISHOPS OF THE KOREAN EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE ON THEIR « AD LIMINA » VISIT**

*Tuesday, 26 March 1996*

*Your Eminence,*

*Dear Brother Bishops, "I thank God in all my remembrance of you ... making my prayer with joy"* (Phil 1, 3).<sup>1</sup> With these words of St Paul, and in that same spirit of thanksgiving and joy, I greet you, the *Bishops of Korea*, on the occasion of your visit *ad Limina Apostolorum*. You have come to Rome, to the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul, in order to express your communion and that of the whole "household of God" (Eph. 2, 19) in Korea with the Successor of Peter who "presides over the universal communion of charity" (Cfr. S. IGNATII ANTIOCHENI *Ad Romanos*, prooemium). Your *ad Limina* visit comes as the Holy Season of Lent is drawing to a close. After our meetings you will return to your Dioceses to lead the faithful in the celebrations that commemorate the most sacred events of our salvation: our Lord's Passion, Death and Resurrection. These most holy of mysteries cannot fail to inspire us as we seek to fulfil with fidelity and diligence our duties as Shepherds of God's People, nor can they fail to shape my reflection with you today. "For Christ, our Paschal Lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us, therefore, celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, that of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1Cor. 5, 7-8).<sup>2</sup> In the context of the Paschal Mystery we understand more clearly that "a Bishop should stand in the midst of his people *as one who serves*" (*Christus Dominus*, 16; cfr. Matth. 20, 28), for Christ himself came not to do his own will but the will of the One who sent him (Cfr. Io. 6, 38). A Bishop must be a good shepherd who knows his sheep and whose sheep know him, to the point that this bond leads him to be ready to lay down his life for his sheep (Cfr. *ibid.* 10, 14-15). He must be a true father who shows love and concern for all, so that the whole family of believers may be gathered together and "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Petr. 3, 18). This then is the calling which the Lord renews to us each day. Our response can never be that of the "hired servants", but must always be *the totally committed response of the Apostles* (Cfr. Marc. 1, 20), called to be the very *foundation* of the whole edifice of the Church (Cfr.

Eph. 2, 20). As Bishops and shepherds of souls, this response of ours becomes *a living witness*, drawing into more intimate communion with the Lord those already in the sheepfold, and drawing to Christ and his Church those who do not yet know the full truth of the Gospel, "the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith" (Rom. 1, 16). In your homeland, this saving power of God is being clearly manifested: the overall number of Catholics continues to grow, programmes of formation for catechumens and neophytes are well attended, and vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life are numerous. Responding to the signs of the times, *the lay faithful are becoming ever more actively involved in the Church's life and apostolate*, in parishes and associations, in evangelization, catechesis and the study and application of the Church's social doctrine. Above all, through their witness of Christian living according to the standards of the Gospel and through their responsible involvement in the nation's social, cultural, political and economic life, the laity are assuming their specific role in the transformation of the temporal order in the perspective of God's Kingdom, by promoting human dignity, building solidarity and serving the common good. There is no question of the many spiritual gifts with which the Lord is blessing your Churches. Your task is to *cultivate these gifts*, nourishing, refining and directing them, so that the whole of human reality will be more fully imbued with Christ's saving presence and love. In this way the Church will truly serve "as a leaven and a kind of soul for human society" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 40).<sup>3</sup> And is there not a great need for the Church in Korea to take on this role with ever increasing vigour and zeal? As you yourselves point out, your society's economic development is accompanied by a certain *materialistic view of reality, which is coming to the fore and even seems to dominate people's outlook*, especially among the younger generation. Not in Korea alone, but throughout your whole region of Asia, certain cultural influences are gaining ground which are in contrast with some of the more authentic human values upon which your society has hitherto based itself. As Pastors of the Church, you are well aware that a great effort of discernment is called for in relation to this phenomenon. You have a specific contribution to make through your vigorous efforts to implement pastoral initiatives and programmes which adequately address the crisis of values which is being widely felt. Among the specific tasks of your ministry in this respect, I encourage you never to tire of proclaiming, teaching and defending *the inviolable sanctity of human life from conception to natural death*. Be spokesmen of the culture of life, seeking effective co-operation with all those who share your deep concern for the "extraordinary increase ... of threats to the life of individuals and peoples, especially where life is weak and defenseless" (IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Evangelium Vitae*, 3).<sup>4</sup> We must all be convinced that *the coming Jubilee marking the 2000th anniversary of the Birth of our Saviour* is a providential opportunity for the whole Church to reflect on what has been achieved so far and on what is required for a deeper, more generous following of the Lord. In your particular Churches you have already begun *a pastoral programme of preparation for that year of grace*. It will be most important to help everyone—priests, religious and laity—to grasp the true significance of this event. Its justification, content and purpose are well expressed in the words of the Council's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World: "The Church believes that Christ, who died and was raised up for all, can through his Spirit offer man the light and the strength to measure up to his supreme destiny.... She likewise holds that *in her most benign Lord and Master can be found the key, the focal point, and the goal of all human history*"

(*Gaudium et Spes*, 10). This whole period therefore must be a time of conversion, grace and renewal, centered on the living presence of the Redeemer. Among those who have a special claim on your pastoral concern and charity are those Catholics who for one reason or another have drifted away from the practice of the faith. Likewise, you will be making special efforts to involve young Catholics in the preparation and celebration of the Jubilee. This is essential, since it is they who will carry the Church into the next century and into the next millennium: *Christ expects great things from young people* (Cfr. IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 58). 5. In a similar context, I also encourage you to continue your *missionary outreach*, within your own country and beyond. This remains, after all, an essential feature of the Church's life in every generation and in every part of the world. It is therefore a fundamental part of our role as Successors of the Apostles, who themselves preached the Good News to all without distinction. The Church in Korea is in a unique position in your region to make known "the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph. 3, 8). In this regard, I am grateful to you for your generosity in sending religious personnel to certain parts of Asia where circumstances make this particularly necessary, and for your willingness to receive candidates from elsewhere into your own seminaries, a tangible sign of your commitment to "*missionary co-operation*" (Cfr. IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Redemptoris Missio*, 85). On another level, I wish to commend the Korean Church's efforts to *show solidarity* with your brothers and sisters in the North, especially in response to the recent floods which devastated several provinces. 6. In fulfilling all of your various pastoral responsibilities, you are assisted by *your brother priests, who are your "necessary helpers and counsellors"* in the sacred ministry (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 7). I rejoice with you that your Dioceses are blessed with many devoted priests and that priestly vocations continue to increase. Since the "first representative of Christ in priestly formation is the Bishop" (IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 65), you must strive to ensure that candidates possess sound motives, genuine piety and sufficient talent, and that they seriously strive to become men of irreproachable moral character. "An extremely important element of a priest's education" (*Ibid.* 45) is his *spiritual formation*, the necessary foundation of all the rest. But this formation does not end with priestly ordination, since, as every priest knows, faithfulness to the priestly ministry involves "a process of continual conversion" (IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 70). By making provision for the spiritual support and continuing formation of your priests, you will help them to acknowledge at all times their true dignity and express in the lives their priestly identity as "men of God", "servants of the Church", "*alter Christus*" (Cfr. *ibid.* 5). The annual "Day for the Sanctification and Renewal of the Clergy", which you have established, is an invitation to the faithful to *pray for the holiness, dedication and fidelity of their ordained ministers*. Thus clergy and laity together will raise a common prayer to the Lord of the harvest that his promise may be fulfilled in your own local churches: "I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding" (Jer. 3, 15). 7. My reflection would hardly be complete without an affectionate mention of the *consecrated men and women* - religious and members of Secular Institutes - whose special consecration to the Lord enables them to bear a particularly effective witness to God's love for his people. In each local Church, they are living signs of the truth that "the Kingdom of God is at hand" (Marc. 1, 15). You know how much the Church in your country depends on their generous service. I urge you to be

close to them and to cherish their charisms as an extraordinary gift of the Lord. Within a few days I will issue the *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation* which presents the fruits of the 1994 Synod of Bishops on the role and mission of the consecrated life in the Church and the world. I entrust this document to you and to the consecrated men and women of your Dioceses, as a token of the love, trust and expectation with which the whole People of God looks to them at this particular moment of salvation history.<sup>8</sup> Dear Brother Bishops, these are some of the thoughts which your visit inspires. I thank you once more for the *generosity and commitment* with which you discharge your pastoral duties. With Passiontide almost upon us, let us continue to look to him who freely laid down his life that he might take it up again (Cfr. Io. 10, 17). I pray unceasingly for you that you may faithfully fulfil your apostolic task of "preaching the word, convincing, rebuking, exhorting and being unfailing in patience and teaching" (Cfr. 2 Tim. 4, 2). And the same prayer I ask of you, that the Lord may strengthen me in my ministry as primary guardian of the deposit of faith, for the good of the Church throughout the world. I commend all of you to Mary, our sorrowful Mother at the foot of the Cross, and entrust to her the needs and hopes of the Church in Korea, as well as the burdens and joys of your own ministry. To each of you and to all the priests, religious and lay faithful of your Dioceses I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.

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