



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO A GROUP OF FRENCH-SPEAKING BISHOPS**

Friday, 19 September 1997

*Your Eminence,
Dear Brother Bishops,*

1. I am pleased to welcome you at the end of an intense session of information and reflection on the many aspects of your episcopal responsibility. I am grateful to Cardinal Jozef Tomko and to his staff at the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples who have organized these weeks of reflection. I warmly greet you all, most of you Bishops from Africa but also from Latin America and Oceania. I am also thinking of those of your confrères in Viêt Nam whom we were expecting, but who, to my regret, have been unable to join you.

2. I am pleased with this meeting because it shows the *affectus collegialis* that unites the Pastors of the universal Church around the Bishop of Rome. During your days of study, you have been able to see the different aspects of your specific ministry in a new light. It is true that its complexity can sometimes seem to you a heavy burden to bear. I would like to encourage you to face it in the very name of the Holy Spirit who was given to you at your episcopal ordination. The Bishop who conferred upon you the fullness of the sacrament of Orders prayed to the Lord in these words: "So now pour out upon this chosen one that power which is from you, the governing Spirit whom you gave to your beloved Son, Jesus Christ" (*Rite for the Ordination of a Bishop*, n. 26).

The Bishop's mission is vast; humanly speaking it is virtually impossible. But if it requires you to give your whole self to it without reserve, you are not left without support. It is in the Spirit of Christ that you became servants of his Body which is the Church, the particular Church entrusted to each one and the universal Church, with Peter's Successor, "a lasting and visible source and foundation of the unity both of faith and of communion" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 18).

3. I invite you to meditate frequently on the New Testament message about the Holy Spirit and especially on what the Apostles John and Paul say of him. You will always find great comfort in the Spirit's rich gifts. I willingly address St Paul's words to you, that you may be "eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit" (Eph 4:3-4). Indeed it is thanks to the Spirit that you are the foundation of *the unity of the diocesan community*, of the unity of the priesthood and of the unity of all the baptized: "One faith, one Baptism" (Eph 4:5). In discerning the Spirit's presence in the diversity of persons and situations, always strive to affirm the unity of the Diocese and begin by showing constant concern for the priests, who are your closest co-workers. May everyone, open to God's action within himself (cf. Phil 2:13), give himself entirely to the common mission, each one in his role as minister, consecrated person or lay faithful!

4. In Jesus' conversation with his Apostles after the Last Supper, there is a strong insistence on the promise of the Spirit. "*The Spirit of truth ... will guide you into all the truth*" (Jn 16:13). It is on him that their ministry of proclaiming the Good News, of teaching the doctrine of salvation, is based. As successors of the Apostles, it is your task to promote and sometimes to defend the authenticity of the Christian message. Indeed, the true reference point throughout the Church's Tradition and her Magisterium is the Spirit who opens us to understanding the truth fully revealed in the Incarnate Son. By listening to him personally in prayer and in study, you will be all the more assured and convincing that you yourselves are docile to the Spirit.

5. "God's love", says St Paul, "has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (Rom 5:5). Through the indwelling Spirit, dedicate your whole ministry to carrying out the new commandment that crowns the Lord's teaching (cf. Jn 13:34). Captivated by *the inseparable love of God and men*, tirelessly enliven your service of charity, your sharing for the sake of the destitute, your help to those who have strayed or are in despair, your support to married couples who must nurture their love by recognizing it as a gift of God, your affectionate pastoral care for young people being educated, your efforts of reconciliation when hostilities occur, and your dialogue with your brothers and sisters of other religious traditions. In this way, the presence of the Spirit, source of hope, will be manifest in your work.

6. Dear Brothers in the first years of your episcopate, I would like to encourage you with these few reflections to serve, "in the new life of the Spirit" (Rom 7:6), the People of God whom it is your responsibility to guide and teach, and who count on you "as good stewards of God's varied grace" (1 Pt 4:10). Draw constant strength from the Paraclete, comforter and defender. He will sustain you and communicate his full dynamism to your mission as evangelizers. You have an immense task in your particular Churches, among your peoples. The Pope trusts you to persevere in it with the strength of the Spirit of truth and love.

As I invoke the intercession of the Virgin Mary and of the holy Apostles upon you and upon all the faithful of your Dioceses, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing to you all.

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