



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS OF QUÉBEC
ON THEIR AD LIMINA VISIT**

Thursday, 22 April 1999

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

1. On the occasion of your *ad limina* visit, a custom that links Catholic communities throughout the world to the 2,000-year-old tradition of the Church and expresses your communion with the Pope and his co-workers, I am delighted to welcome you today, Pastors of the Catholic Church in the Apostolic Region of Québec. I cordially greet Bishop Pierre Morissette, your President, and each of you, especially the two new Auxiliary Bishops of Montréal and the Maronite and Melkite Ordinaries. Our meeting enables me to be close in thought to the priests and deacons who work zealously with you, the consecrated persons involved in the apostolate and those with a special mission of prayer, as well as the lay faithful who are staunchly devoted to serving the Church and society in their country.

In your quinquennial reports, you speak of your joy at seeing so many people taking part in the Church's mission, each according to his own specific activity. I give thanks with you for the renewed dynamism of your local communities. Please convey the affectionate encouragement of Peter's Successor to your closest co-workers, the ordained ministers, who faithfully bear the burden of the day, and tell the religious and lay people of your Dioceses of my trust and esteem for all they accomplish by letting the Lord guide them.

2. Yours is the first Apostolic Region of Canada to make its quinquennial visit this year. With the various groups of Bishops from your country who will come one after another in the weeks ahead, I hope to address important topics for the Church today, as I give you some points to reflect on in the spirit of what the Lord asked of Peter: "Strengthen your brothers" (Lk 22:31). In your reports, you mention the question of young people and the pastoral care you wish to develop with them. I will therefore devote more time today to certain aspects of this specific mission, but without attempting to give a complete picture of the local situations and the expectations of young people, which you know.

3. The Church in Québec has a rich tradition of commitment to young people, who are the hope of the future (cf. *Ecclesia in America*, n. 47). I am delighted with the attention that is paid to young people in families, parishes, schools and movements. I salute your efforts, as well as those of the many adults, priests, religious, parents and teachers, to offer the young a renewed and organized presentation of the faith, and I invite all the local communities to mobilize themselves in this task, especially in view of the Great Jubilee and the forthcoming *World Youth Day*, which will take place in Rome. The Jubilee Year is an incomparable opportunity for giving a new impetus to youth ministry.

4. Awakening faith within the framework of the family is crucial; it enables children to advance in their interior search for God, the Father of all life, and to discover the profound truth of the Christian mystery. Family prayer is also a great blessing, for it gives each person the possibility to learn the words of a filial relationship with the Lord. As the child develops his interior life and becomes *capax Dei*, as the Fathers of the Church said, the family has a specific and irreplaceable role in his human and spiritual formation. Early childhood is an important time for the discovery of human, moral and spiritual values. As you yourselves recognize, it is often an occasion for parents to question themselves about their own faith, their attachment to Christ and the conformity of their life with the Gospel. Indeed, how can parents respond to the demanding requests of their little ones and give an account of the hope that is in them if they do not take the time to deepen their own Christian journey, to encounter Christ in prayer, in reading the Scriptures and in ecclesial life? The Church must help and support couples and families so that they can become aware of their mission as teachers of faith and fulfil it.

5. You told me of the problems you encounter in the pastoral care of adolescents and young people. However you stress that adults are committed to accompanying them zealously, using all their qualities as pastoral leaders and their ecclesial sense. I encourage them not to despair if they do not immediately see the results of their efforts. May they always remember that they are instruments which the Holy Spirit uses in his own mysterious way! In contemporary society, which does not offer any meaning for their life, young people carry within themselves questions and sufferings which are expressed in forms of personal and social behaviour which can be disconcerting to those who are close to them, especially the phenomena of violence and drugs, as well as thoughts of suicide. "Youth is a time of an especially intense discovery of one's 'self' and one's 'choice of life'. It is a time for growth which ought to progress 'in wisdom, age and grace before God and people' (Lk 2:52)" (*Christifideles laici*, n. 46). Education requires endless patience and loving closeness. This helps young people to love one another and to discover that they are loved by adults and, through them, by God who has confidence in them. I invite you to develop and strengthen the pastoral care of youth, particularly by sending on mission to them young people who have had special spiritual, but also human and psychological formation: priests, deacons, religious and lay persons.

Young people need competent educators and spiritual advisers to guide them wisely and

sensitively, concerned to let them mature gradually, to sow the seed of God in their hearts and to be of service in their "encounter with the living Jesus Christ", which "is the path to conversion, communion and solidarity" (cf. *Ecclesia in America*, nn. 7; 27). In this area it is important that priests also offer young people a solid sacramental life, especially the sacrament of forgiveness. In the personal encounter with Christ's minister and through the personal confession of his sins, the young person will become aware of the Lord's love and the response he must make; he will unburden himself to the Lord; he will learn to live in truth; he will be guided on his way and will find the means to struggle against sin.

6. In addition, I cannot too strongly recommend that priests, consecrated persons and lay people who are skilled in this area should offer spiritual direction to young people so that they can review the different stages of their life under God's eyes, discern his presence and do his will, the source of profound freedom. Guidance by an adult whom the young person trusts will help him overcome the most difficult inner struggles, analyze his own conduct, make decisions according to a scale of values and enter into an ever closer relationship with Christ. Likewise, in drawing close to young people, adults are someone they can talk to and the witnesses they need in order to have a calm vision of their future as human beings and Christians. Thus young people will be able to listen with trust to Christ's call to put out into the deep (cf. Lk 5:4); they will dare to reveal their Christian identity and will be missionaries among their friends in a society where, as you say, faith tends to be privatized and hence the Church has difficulty in making herself known.

For the young to grow in faith, you should also provide them a place and give them their share of responsibility, not only in their own age groups but also in the local communities, so that they will feel they are an active part of the whole Church, praying, gathering for Sunday Mass, finding strength in sacramental life and living charity. In this way young people will realize that society and the Church need them and that they are called to serve their brothers and sisters in order to build the civilization of love.

In your Dioceses, large gatherings or small group meetings are regularly organized to help young people reflect on their emotional life and the vocation to marriage, thereby communicating to them the meaning and value of human sexuality. I salute all the adults who are involved in this educational process and invite them to pursue their mission, so that young people may be offered the teaching of the Church, which will be constructive for their human and spiritual formation. In a world where the family cell is fragile and many wounds are deeply affecting young people, particularly those who experience the separation of parents and the creation of new families, it is the Church's duty to educate them in an emotional life that is built on sound human and moral values, so that tomorrow they can commit themselves to married life, conscious of their responsibilities and the mission it represents for their spouse and children.

7. Throughout childhood and adolescence, Christian communities and educators should be attentive to developing a well-structured catechesis, so that young people can know the chief

elements of the Christian mystery. In this spirit, it is important to provide a follow-up to the sacraments of Christian initiation, so that children can have a deep spiritual and ecclesial life that will help them throughout their lives. I invite the faithful to make continual efforts to pass their faith and values on to children. Their formation cannot consist only of scientific and technical training. It must incorporate the anthropological, moral and spiritual dimensions in order to build the young person's personality. I ask all teachers and administrators in religious educational institutions to see that their specific Catholic identity, which is a treasure, is neither lost nor put under a bushel.

8. One of the most essential dimensions of the Bishop's ministry is the pastoral care of priestly vocations, which should be constantly organized and developed with the help of priests as well as solid and dynamic lay people, while taking care to entrust an active part of this work to some young priests who can be models and examples and who are the closest in age and mentality to the next generation. They will show that the priestly ministry is a source of joy and stability. The pastoral care of vocations also requires the involvement of all the local Church leaders. It is a question of sowing the word of God in young boys' hearts, awakening in them a desire to follow Christ and generously transmitting the Lord's call to them, setting forth "explicitly and forcefully the priestly vocation as a real possibility for those young people who demonstrate the necessary gifts and talents" (*Pastores dabo vobis*, n. 39). You should also help them to discover the radical commitment which this implies through the gift of self to Christ in celibacy for the service of their brethren. Possible confusions which would downplay the connection between the priesthood and celibacy can only be harmful to the healthy searching of young people and their future priestly commitment. I am delighted that in certain Dioceses there are some minor seminaries where young men can really explore a priestly vocation, while pursuing classical studies. These are a seedbed of vocations and must not be neglected. I also invite all priests to be attentive to young men, to awaken vocations and not to be afraid to suggest the path of the priesthood to them.

9. Jesus also calls certain young men and women to follow him more exclusively and to consecrate themselves totally to him in religious life, to offer the world a witness which "in the first place ... should entail *the affirmation of the primacy of God and of eternal life*, as evidenced in the following and imitation of the chaste, poor and obedient Christ, who was completely consecrated to the glory of God and to the love of his brethren" (*Vita consecrata*, n. 85). Christ's call to consecrated life is an eloquent witness for today's world, by calling to mind that true happiness comes from Christ and that the human person's freedom can neither be separated from the truth nor from God (cf. *ibid.*, nn. 87-91). I urge men and women religious to show young people that a life totally given in radical love for Christ and his Church brings happiness.

10. I encourage you to continue to vitalize the living forces of the Church in Québec so that everyone in families, parishes, schools or movements will share in the mission of walking with young people, guiding them in their growth, offering them the faith as they search, so that they will joyfully discover the goodness of the Father, live the Good News of Jesus Christ and be led by the power of the Holy Spirit. In this way they can open themselves to the Lord's call to take part in the

work of Creation and Redemption in brotherhood and solidarity, thus discovering that life has meaning, that it is worthwhile to commit themselves to the priesthood, the consecrated life or marriage, to work in promoting the common good in the world and to participate wholeheartedly in the communion and mission of the Church.

11. At the end of our meeting, I encourage you to persevere in your episcopal mission, while inviting you to continue your fraternal collaboration and to support one another in your ministry: thus your diocesan Churches will be more united and will help one another confront the challenges you face by being communities centred on Jesus Christ, in dialogue with the world.

Please convey the greetings of Peter's Successor to all your co-workers and to the People of God entrusted to your care, and in a special way to young people. As I invoke the motherly intercession of the Virgin Mary, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing to you and to all your diocesans.

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