



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER  
TO THE BISHOPS OF CANADA IN  
THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

*Your Eminence,  
Dear Brother Bishops,*

1. In the love of the Holy Spirit, I greet you, the Bishops of New Brunswick, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, joined today by Cardinal Ambrozic and the Auxiliary Bishops of Toronto, as you come on pilgrimage ad Limina Apostolorum: "Grace and peace to you in all abundance through knowledge of God and Jesus our Lord" (2 Pt 1: 2). Here in Rome, at the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul, you renew the bonds of communion which bind you to the Successor of Peter and you rekindle the spiritual energies which your ministry demands. These are the tombs of martyrs, and they recall the power of Christian witness in every age and remind us that the Church is born from the shedding of blood - the blood of the Lamb which flows for ever in the heavens, and the blood of those who have washed their robes white in his blood (cf. Rv 7: 14). Here you celebrate the Eucharistic Sacrifice on altars raised in memory of "those who were slain for the witness they bore to the word of God" (Rv 6: 9); and you join them in singing the great hymn of the Church: "To the One who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor, glory and power, for ever" (Rv 5: 13). You journey back in time to the very origins of Christianity, but you do so in order to see more clearly and confidently the future which God has in mind for the Church in the millennium about to dawn.

2. At the heart of God's plan for the Church today there stands that great moment of grace, the Second Vatican Council. The decades since the Council have not been untroubled, but everywhere there are signs of the wondrous fruits which the Spirit can bring when we respond in faith to his promptings. Unquestionably, one of the fruits of the Spirit in the years since the Council has been the stirring of new spiritual vitality and apostolic energies among the lay faithful. Catholic lay women and men are living the grace of their Baptism in ways which show forth more splendidly

the full array of charisms which invigorate and beautify the Church. We cannot cease to praise God for this.

Continuing the reflection begun with the previous groups of Canadian Bishops in this series of ad Limina visits, today I wish to share with you some brief thoughts on the relationship between priests and lay faithful in the pastoral life of your communities and in the Church's witness before society. We readily speak of Bishops and priests as "pastors", drawing upon the biblical and patristic tradition, in which the image of the shepherd is rich and evocative. Sometimes, though, this has been accompanied by a certain reluctance to speak of lay people as "the flock", as if to do so condemned the laity to a strictly passive and dependent role. Certainly this is not what the Council had in mind, nor is it what the Church needs now. It is therefore worthwhile to revisit the biblical image in order to rediscover the sense of complementarity and communion which it implies.

The image comes from a world in which the flock was the cornerstone of economic life and the key to human survival. The shepherd fed and watered the sheep and protected them day and night against predators and disease; and in that sense, the sheep lived because of the shepherd. The flock in turn provided food, clothing and even shelter not only to the shepherd but also to the entire family or tribe. In that sense the shepherd was as dependent upon the flock as the flock was upon him. What the biblical image offers therefore is a vision of life-giving reciprocity: the sheep live by the shepherd and the shepherd lives by the sheep. The same vision finds expression in what Saint Paul writes to the Church in Thessalonica: "Now we live, for you stand firm in the Lord" (1 *Thes* 3: 8). The Apostle has given life to the community and now, by their fidelity, they give life to him.

3. More radically still, the sheep become the body of the shepherd especially as the source of food. Here the imagery is so profound that it introduces us to the notion of the Church as the Body of Christ. Jesus Christ is the eternal Shepherd of the flock in whose name all pastors serve; but the flock is Christ's Body in the world. Again we have a dramatic reciprocity of self-giving, which in this case is not just a matter of material life and human survival, but the great mystery of Jesus' self-giving sacrifice for the world's salvation, made present whenever the Eucharist is celebrated. Here we come to the very heart of the mystery of Christian shepherding, since Christ the Shepherd is also the Lamb. Indeed, he is the Shepherd because he is the Lamb. No pastor can be a true shepherd of God's flock unless he is one with the Lamb of God, slain for the sins of the world. We cannot hope to be shepherds conformed to Christ unless we live the mystery of his Cross (cf. Phil 3: 10). This is no less true of pastors in the Church today than it was of the Apostles to whose tombs you come as pilgrims. In dying a martyr's death, they were made completely one with the Lamb of God and thus they are for ever the shepherds who "from their place in heaven. . . guide us still" (Preface of the Apostles I). What is true of the pastors is also true of the whole Church, the priestly People of God, in the world. The heart of all pastoral activity and of every form of apostolate is union with Christ's Paschal Mystery. By becoming one with the crucified and risen Lord through the grace of the Holy Spirit, all the baptized become capable of taking part in the Church's evangelizing mission and in her service to the human family. Shepherd and sheep have

complementary vocations of service.

4. Une telle vision de la complémentarité et de communion entre prêtres et laïcs entraîne des formes de vies spécifiques pour les prêtres et pour la formation dans les séminaires, qui font apparaître clairement que le prêtre est un homme mis à part pour un service particulier. Dans la liturgie et dans la charge pastorale des communautés, les prêtres continuent l'unique sacerdoce de Jésus Christ, "le Chef des pasteurs" (1 P 5, 4). En conduisant le troupeau et en présidant ses prières, le prêtre l'élève vers Dieu et ennoblit la vocation chrétienne de tous les fidèles, dont il est le serviteur. Il est important que les prêtres soient en même temps "mis à part" et "serviteurs", l'un étant la condition de l'autre. Si le prêtre n'est pas clairement mis à part, il ne pourra pas remplir le service que l'Eglise lui demande; s'il n'est pas un véritable serviteur, il sera conduit à une solitude vide et stérile qui est étrangère à un pasteur authentique. Le célibat sacerdotal, la discipline de prière, la simplicité de vie et l'habit ecclésiastique constituent des signes évidents que le prêtre est un homme mis à part pour le service de l'Evangile. Il est indéniable que de tels signes sont porteurs de fruits, spécialement dans une culture qui cherche de manière angoissée des signes de la transcendance, une culture qui est à la recherche de vrais pasteurs et de témoins convaincants.

5. La complémentarité de la vocation différente des prêtres et des laïcs doit constituer le cadre dans lequel se déploient les efforts pour rassembler les forces de l'Eglise en vue de la nouvelle évangélisation au Canada. Cette complémentarité, qui répond au caractère symphonique du Corps du Christ, dont tous sont membres mais dans lequel tous n'ont pas les mêmes fonctions, est la condition d'une coopération porteuse de grâce à la mission de l'Eglise. La charge pastorale des prêtres n'est en aucun cas une manière d'étouffer les initiatives des laïcs ni de réduire le peuple à une attitude de passivité ou de dépendance. Il convient au contraire de favoriser des formes de témoignages laïques qui non seulement rendront plus efficacement l'Eglise présente au coeur du monde, mais feront naître d'abondantes et de bonnes vocations sacerdotales. Il faut prendre soin cependant d'éviter d'atténuer la distinction entre le sacerdoce ministériel et la vocation laïque, car ce n'est certainement pas ce que les Pères conciliaires avaient en vue lorsqu'ils demandaient une plus grande coopération entre les prêtres et les laïcs, cherchant en particulier à affermir la vocation des laïcs dans l'Eglise et dans le monde. Une notion imprécise de la mission différente des prêtres et des laïcs a parfois conduit à une crise d'identité et de confiance au sein du clergé, mais aussi à des formes d'activité laïques qui sont soit trop cléricalisées, soit trop "politiques".

Le premier domaine de la vocation laïque est la vie de la société, de la culture et de l'entreprise, qui s'étend bien au-delà des limites visibles de l'Eglise. Les laïcs, hommes et femmes, y sont appelés à remplir leur vocation baptismale et à promouvoir l'art d'être chrétiens dans le monde. A notre époque où diminuent les entrées dans l'Eglise et la pratique religieuse, il peut sembler étrange que l'Eglise veuille mettre l'accent sur la vocation séculière des laïcs. C'est précisément la mission évangélisatrice des laïcs dans le monde qui constitue la réponse de l'Eglise au malaise de

l'indifférence, que l'on décrit souvent comme la "sécularisation". La tâche spécifique des laïcs d'aujourd'hui, hommes et femmes, était un des thèmes prépondérants de l'Exhortation apostolique post-synodale *Ecclesia in America*, qui dit entre autre: "Bien que l'apostolat intra-ecclésial des laïcs doive être stimulé, il faut faire en sorte qu'il coexiste avec l'activité propre des laïcs pour laquelle ils ne peuvent être substitués par des prêtres, à savoir le domaine des réalités temporelles" (n. 44).

6. We must not forget that the intention of the Second Vatican Council was to unleash new evangelizing forces within the Church, in the wake of the devastation caused by the two World Wars and looking to the prospects of the new millennium. A new kind of missionary commitment was required, a new evangelization, and the Council, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, became the means of setting that dynamism in motion. This has been the overriding purpose of every new provision for the life of the Church resulting from the Council. Therefore, we must carefully avoid any form of ecclesial introversion that would be unfaithful to the Council's intention, since it would diminish rather than increase the missionary thrust needed to meet the needs of the new century. Dear Brother Bishops, we are called to listen with a disciple's ear to what the Spirit is saying to the Churches (cf. Rv 2: 7), so that we may speak as teachers in Christ's name, joyfully declaring with Saint John Damascene: "O glorious people of the Church, towering mountain, pure and clear, you who rely on the help of God, you in whom God takes his rest, receive from our lips the true faith of Christ untainted by error as it is handed down to us, which builds up and strengthens the Church" (Statement of Faith, 1). I pray most fervently that you will succeed in this great pastoral task, so that the Church in Canada will shine forth in all her glory as the Bride of Christ, whom he has taken to himself in infinite love. Entrusting your apostolic mission to the intercession of the Virgin Mary, who in every age is the bright Star of Evangelization, I gladly impart my Apostolic Blessing to you, and to the priests, the women and men religious, and the lay faithful of your Dioceses.

*Castel Gandolfo, 25 September 1999*