



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS OF COSTA RICA
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Friday, 30 November 2001

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

1. During these days of your *ad limina* visit you have had the opportunity to venerate the tombs of the holy Apostles, Peter and Paul, renewing before them fidelity to the faith you have received, and reviving your evangelizing spirit, which made these great witnesses of Christ, together with the other Apostles, a firm foundation for the Church of all time (cf. Eph 2,20). It is therefore as though you were returning to the origins of the apostolic ministry in the different particular Churches of Costa Rica, planting and watering the seed of the Gospel, so that God will give it abundant growth (cf. I Cor 3,6-7).

In this spirit I received you with great joy today, to share your pastoral concerns, to encourage you in your efforts to implant the Gospel in the hearts of the beloved sons and daughters of Costa Rica more and more firmly every day, thus carrying out the task Jesus gave Peter to strengthen his brothers in the faith (cf. Lk 22,32).

I cordially thank Archbishop Román Arrieta Villalobos, Archbishop of San José and President of the Bishops' Conference, for his words on behalf of you all, expressing closeness and a spirit of communion with the Bishop of Rome, to whom you are bound by bonds of unity, love and peace (cf. *Lumen gentium*, n. 22). In them I also feel the heartbeat of a peace-loving people "with a fruitful history" (*Address at the Airport of San José*, 2 March 1983, n. 1) of which I cherish such grateful memories from my Pastoral Visit in 1983.

2. I am pleased to know that in facing the challenges of the new millennium, your country is open to hope, thanks to the generous dedication of the pastors and their collaborators in the work of

evangelization. The commemoration of the centenary of your wonderful predecessor, Bishop Bernardo Augusto Thiel, the second Bishop of San José, who was soon able to spread the first seeds of the Church's social teaching has encouraged you. The long democratic tradition of dialogue and tolerance in Costa Rica is largely his work. It is a precious heritage that must spur you to renewed trust in the peacemaking power of the Gospel at a time when this value seems so threatened and almost impossible to attain. This conviction will also contribute to focusing with Christian far-sightedness on the modern processes of social coexistence, which in Costa Rica takes the form of an influx of emigrants coming from the countries on your borders.

Your sensitivity in preserving and increasing the spirit of communion, in each of your ecclesial communities, among yourselves and with the Sister Churches of Central America, is also satisfying.

These relations have great value, because they more effectively foster specific aspects of pastoral action and make the Church "the home and school of communion", which is "the great challenge facing us in the millennium which is now beginning" (*Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 43).

3. The relations of bishops with their priests is the best place for living the spirituality of communion, since a spirit of harmony should exist between the Pastor and his close collaborators if they are to revive pastoral work together with the whole diocese (cf. *Christus Dominus*, n. 16). The reports you sent highlight the special attention you pay to your clergy, who are comparatively plentiful, with whose spiritual and pastoral care you are concerned. You want every priest to live *"his personal encounter with the living Christ, to be a qualified agent of conversion, communion and solidarity, and thus to give an impetus to the new evangelization"*, as you said in the recent Message you sent to them (*Message of the Bishops of Costa Rica to their Priests, 12 April 2001*, IV).

Make sure concrete choices are made that lead to an attentive discernment in the admission of candidates to the priesthood and to an intensified spiritual formation of seminarians, by following them and guiding them "towards an affective maturity that makes them suitable to embrace priestly celibacy and capable of living in communion with their brothers in the priestly vocation" (*Ecclesia in America*, n. 40). Do not ignore the programmes of continuing formation for all priests. If the goal of all pastoral action is holiness, the ministers of the Gospel must be the first to witness to this "task which must shape the whole of Christian life" (*Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 30). The bishop must be on personal, friendly terms with his priests, to encourage them in their vocation, to direct them in their activities, and to kindle apostolic zeal in them. When necessary, he will be able to correct them in a fatherly and kindly way.

4. In Costa Rica, people are living a moment that is spiritually decisive. On the one hand, everywhere one finds a lifestyle based on merely material criteria, which is an incentive to trivial consumerism with negative consequences for the dignity of the person and for the common good

of society. On the other hand, one can appreciate the rebirth of a profound religious spirit that has put down deep roots in the Costa Rican people, and their search for a deep meaning of life. In this context, even more pressing is the urgent need "to rediscover and to set forth once more the authentic reality of the Christian faith, which is not simply a set of propositions to be accepted with intellectual assent. Rather faith is a lived knowledge of Christ, a living remembrance of his commandments, and a truth to be lived out" (*Veritatis splendor*, n. 88) in a world that is increasingly secularized. In fact, the Church's mission is to bring the light of the Gospel to all spheres of human life, so that each one may realize the universal vocation to holiness.

It is very important to continue an evangelizing action that reaches out to all the classes of society, and develops in the faithful the joy of believing and celebrating their own faith, their responsibility as members of the Body of Christ (cf. I Cor 12,27) and their share in the mission of proclaiming the Good News to all creatures (cf. Mk 16,15). To this end you must give a decisive stimulus to catechesis so that it may offer a more and more consistent formation in the faith. Today's Christians will be prepared to give a response to those who ask them to account for the hope that is in them (I Pt 3,15). At the same time, make yourselves a faithful echo of the teaching of Jesus who roused such wonder in the crowd (cf. Mt 22, 22-23), and offer a sense of the transcendent value of life, curtailing the progress of the sects and the new religious groups that are proselytizing your people (cf. *Ecclesia in America*, n. 73).

5. I am aware of your efforts to involve lay people in this task, as I instructed you during my visit to Costa Rica (cf. *Address to the Bishops of Central America*, 2 March 1983, n. 3), and I note the increase in catechists in your dioceses. They are often the most direct channel through which the gift of faith grows in children and guides them at the turning point of life. They deserve special attention from pastors, so that they have the proper theological and spiritual formation, to witness to what they teach, and be fully aware of the transcendental aspect of their mission in the Church.

Lay catechists, through their special ties with the parish and with other ecclesial communities, through their theological formation and their familiarity with the Church's teaching, must also be committed Christians in daily life. They will collaborate with the pastors in the directly pastoral tasks and maintain their specific vocation, where they act in the temporal order "*guided by the light of the Gospel and the mind of the Church, prompted by Christian love ... in a direct way and in their own specific manner*" (*Apostolicam actuositatem*, n. 7; cf. *Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 46).

The great hopes placed in the laity in Costa Rica constitute an appeal to pastors for attention, so that they will feel the urgent need to give sound formation in the spiritual life and Christian criteria that the lay faithful have to bring to life in the sectors of family, society, politics, work and culture (cf. *Ecclesia in America*, n. 44). You are also called to watch over and encourage the specific movements and associations, that act as a vehicle to help their members, to integrate the new generations and to foster the Christian lifestyle of the members.

6. You also expressed your worry about the situation of families in your country; they suffer from the "radical and widespread crisis" that this "fundamental institution" is experiencing (*Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 47). At times, in some of your dioceses, this phenomenon may have had a special impact, both because it has happened so quickly and because of the deep esteem in which the family has traditionally been held. The problems have caused discouragement in the face of an unhopd for and seemingly relentless phenomenon. I would therefore like to remind you of Jesus' comforting words when his closest disciples were hesitating: "*Take heart, it is I; have no fear!*" (Mt 14,27). With these words in our minds and hearts, we can overcome the temptation to waver in our mission to watch over the treasure of love and life that God has given us with the institution of the family, founded on indissoluble marriage.

In fact, the Church has to be active when the gift and the fundamental right to life from its conception are disputed; or when the love of the spouses is impoverished, the value of their reciprocal fidelity weakens or the natural bond between man and women which reaches its true fullness in marriage is broken. Through fidelity to the Gospel and the radical esteem of the dignity of the human being, it is impossible to remain neutral before phenomena that are the hallmark of a culture of hedonism, selfishness and death, however great the problems, however powerful external influences may be.

In this regard, it is necessary to revive a family ministry that prepares young people for forming a new home; and that provides guidance for married couples in the difficulties they may encounter, helping them to accept children joyfully, to bring them up with tender love and to pass on the faith to them. It will also be necessary to revive the social, economic and legal conditions that can safeguard the unity and stability of homes, asking families themselves to "become increasingly conscious of the care due to children, and to play an active role in the Church and in society in safeguarding their rights" (n. 47).

7. I also want to refer to an area that is crucial for the Church: religious institutes and consecrated persons. Not only have they made a decisive contribution to the evangelization of your country, but also to a large extent to forging the cultural identity of Costa Rica.

The Church constantly gives thanks to the Holy Spirit for the consecrated life that he inspires within her, which "sinks its roots into the Gospel and brings forth abundant fruit in every season" (*Vita consecrata*, n. 5). Some of these fruits are clearly visible in the many works dedicated to education, to youth ministry, to the care of the sick or to the many forms of poverty and marginalization. However, over and above its concrete activities, the ecclesial community must appreciate that it is "an especially rich expression of Gospel values and a more complete expression of the Church's purpose" (*ibid.*, n. 32). The development of consecrated life in each particular Church shows her ability to present Christ with such vigour that it inspires the desire to follow him in the total, radical way of the Gospel.

Pastors are required to promote vocations to the consecrated life and to watch that the proper identity of each institute be respected (cf. *CIC*, cann. 385, 586). They should foster great esteem for a life that is totally consecrated to God, and establish forms of vocations apostolate that show "the unanimous commitment of the whole Church" in this field (cf. *Vita consecrata*, n. 64).

8. I encourage you, Bishops of Costa Rica, to continue to bring new enthusiasm to the mission of evangelization, to satisfy with Christ's message the deepest yearnings of the People of God: children and young people, the sick and the elderly, women and men, families and peoples, the poor and the neglected. I entrust to the protection of *Nuestra Señora de los Angeles*, Mother and Advocate of the Costa Rican people the pastoral resolutions which motivate you and which must inspire sound faith in the particular Churches entrusted to your care.

I thank you for the generous way you fulfil your ministry. I ask you to greet your communities warmly in the Pope's name and to tell them how close I am to them. To them and to you I impart a heartfelt Apostolic Blessing.