



# The Holy See

---

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

*Tuesday, 7 May 2002*

*Dear Brother Bishops,*

1. "Peace to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (*Eph* 6:23). With the words of the Apostle Paul and in the joy of Easter, I welcome you, *the Bishops of the Antilles*, on the occasion of your visit *ad Limina Apostolorum*. Through you, I greet all the faithful of Christ entrusted to your care. May the peace of the Risen Lord reign in every heart and every home throughout the Caribbean region!

I thank Archbishop Clarke for his gracious words expressing *that spirituality of communion which is the very heart of the Church* (cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 43-45). It is this communion which draws you to Rome, on pilgrimage to the tombs of the Apostles, where you renew your fidelity to the apostolic tradition, the roots of which reach back to the Lord's commission (cf. *Mt* 28:19-20) and ultimately touch the inner life of the Trinity, the ground of all reality.

You come as Pastors who have been called to share in the fullness of Christ's eternal priesthood. First and foremost, *you are priests*: not corporate executives, business managers, finance officers or bureaucrats, but priests. This means above all that you have been set apart to offer sacrifice, since this is the essence of priesthood, and *the core of the Christian priesthood is the offering of the sacrifice of Christ*. That is why the Eucharist is the very essence of what we are as priests; it is why there is nothing more important that we do than offer the Eucharistic Sacrifice; and it is why our celebration of the Eucharist together lies at the heart of your *ad Limina* visit. We can never forget that the tombs of the Apostles which we venerate in Rome are *the tombs of martyrs*, whose life and death was drawn more and more into the depths of Christ's own sacrifice, until they could say: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (*Gal*

2:20). That was *the womb of their extraordinary missionary work*, which we as their Successors must emulate in our own times if we are to be faithful to the new evangelization for which the Second Vatican Council providentially prepared the Church.

2. Le Concile fut "la grande grâce dont l'Église a bénéficié au vingtième siècle" (*Novo millennio ineunte*, n. 57). Bien que les décennies qui nous en séparent n'aient pas été exemptes de difficultés – on a connu des périodes au cours desquelles des éléments importants de la vie chrétienne semblaient même en péril –, de nombreux signes indiquent maintenant ce nouveau printemps de l'esprit dont le grand Jubilé de l'an 2000 a fait apparaître de manière évidente le caractère prophétique. Dans les années qui suivirent le Concile, *l'apparition de nouvelles aspirations spirituelles et de nouvelles énergies apostoliques parmi les fidèles de l'Église fut sans conteste l'un des fruits de l'Esprit*. Les laïques vivent la grâce de leur Baptême sous des formes qui font apparaître de manière plus resplendissante le riche éventail des charismes dans l'Église; et pour cela nous ne cessons de rendre grâce à Dieu.

Il est également vrai que le réveil des fidèles laïques dans l'Église a vu apparaître en même temps, dans vos pays aussi, des problèmes relatifs à l'appel au sacerdoce, s'accompagnant de faibles entrées au séminaire dans les Églises dont vous avez la charge. En tant que Pasteurs, vous êtes vivement préoccupés car, comme vous le savez bien, *l'Église catholique ne peut pas exister sans le ministère sacerdotal que le Christ lui-même désire pour elle*.

Des personnes, on le sait, affirment que la diminution du nombre de prêtres est l'œuvre de l'Esprit Saint et que Dieu lui-même conduirait l'Église, faisant en sorte que le gouvernement des fidèles laïques se substitue au gouvernement des prêtres. Une telle affirmation ne rend certainement pas compte de ce que les Pères conciliaires ont exprimé lorsqu'ils ont cherché à promouvoir une implication plus grande des fidèles laïques dans l'Église. Dans leur enseignement, les Pères conciliaires ont tout simplement mis en évidence *la profonde complémentarité entre les prêtres et les laïques* qu'implique la nature symphonique de l'Église. Une mauvaise compréhension de cette complémentarité a parfois conduit à une crise d'identité et de confiance chez les prêtres, et aussi à des formes d'engagement laïque trop cléricales ou trop politisées.

L'engagement des laïcs devient une forme de cléralisme quand les rôles sacramentels ou liturgiques qui reviennent au prêtre sont assumés par des fidèles laïques ou bien lorsque ceux-ci se mettent à accomplir des tâches qui relèvent du gouvernement pastoral propre au prêtre. Dans de telles situations, ce que le Concile a enseigné sur *le caractère essentiellement séculier de la vocation laïque* est le plus souvent négligé (cf. *Lumen gentium*, n. 31). C'est le prêtre, en tant que ministre ordonné, qui, au nom du Christ, préside la communauté chrétienne, sur les plans liturgique et pastoral. Les laïques l'assistent de bien des manières dans cette tâche. Mais le lieu premier de l'exercice de la vocation laïque est le monde des réalités économiques, sociales, politiques et culturelles. C'est dans ce monde que les laïcs sont invités à vivre leur vocation baptismale, non pas comme des consommateurs passifs, mais en tant que *membres actifs de la*

*grande œuvre qui exprime le caractère chrétien.* Il revient au prêtre de présider la communauté chrétienne afin de permettre aux laïques de remplir la tâche ecclésiale et missionnaire qui leur est propre. En un temps de sécularisation insidieuse, il peut paraître étrange que l'Église insiste autant sur la vocation séculière des laïques. Or c'est précisément le témoignage évangélique des fidèles dans le monde qui est le cœur de *la réponse de l'Église au malaise de la sécularisation* (cf. *Ecclesia in America*, n. 44).

L'engagement des laïques est politisé lorsque le laïcat est absorbé par l'exercice du "pouvoir" à l'intérieur de l'Église. Cela arrive lorsque l'Église n'est vue en terme de «mystère» de grâce qui la caractérise, mais en termes sociologiques ou même politiques, souvent sur la base d'une compréhension erronée de la notion de "peuple de Dieu", une notion qui a de profondes et riches bases bibliques et qui est si heureusement utilisée par le Concile Vatican II. Lorsque ce n'est pas le service mais le pouvoir qui modèle toute forme de gouvernement dans l'Église, que ce soit dans le clergé ou dans le laïcat, les intérêts opposés commencent à se faire sentir. Le cléralisme est pour les prêtres cette forme de gouvernement qui relève plus du pouvoir que du service, et qui engendre toujours des antagonismes entre les prêtres et le peuple; ce cléralisme se retrouve dans des formes de leadership laïque qui ne tiennent pas suffisamment compte de la nature transcendante et sacramentelle de l'Église, ainsi que de son rôle dans le monde. Ces deux attitudes sont nocives. À l'inverse, ce dont l'Église a besoin, c'est *d'un sens de la complémentarité entre la vocation du prêtre et celle des laïcs qui soit plus profond et plus créatif.* Sans cela, nous ne pouvons pas espérer être fidèles aux enseignements du Concile ni sortir des difficultés habituelles concernant l'identité du prêtre, la confiance en lui et l'appel au sacerdoce.

3. Yet we must also look far beyond the bounds of the Church, for the Council was essentially concerned to foster new energies for her mission to the world. You are well aware that *an essential part of her evangelizing mission is the inculturation of the Gospel*, and I know that there has been much attention in your region to the need to develop Caribbean forms of Catholic worship and life. In the Encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, I stressed that "the Gospel is not opposed to any culture, as if in engaging a culture the Gospel would seek to strip it of its native riches and force it to adopt forms which are alien to it" (No. 71). I went on to point out that cultures are not only not diminished by the encounter with the Gospel, but are "prompted to open themselves to the newness of the Gospel's truth and to be stirred by this truth to develop in new ways" (*ibid.*; cf. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in America*, 70).

To this end, it is important to keep in mind *the three criteria for discerning whether or not our attempts to inculturate the Gospel are soundly based.* The first of these is the universality of the human spirit, whose basic needs are no different even in vastly different cultures. Therefore, no culture can ever be made absolute in a way that denies that the human spirit is, at the deepest level, the same in every time, place and culture. The second criterion is that, in engaging newer cultures, the Church cannot abandon the precious heritage drawn from her initial engagement with Greco-Latin culture, for to do this would be "to deny the providential plan of God who guides his

Church down the paths of time and history" (*Fides et Ratio*, 72). It is not a question, then, of rejecting the Greco-Latin heritage in order to allow the Gospel to take new flesh in Caribbean culture. The challenge rather is to bring the cultural heritage of the Church into deep and mutually enriching dialogue with Caribbean culture. The third criterion is that a culture must not become enclosed in its difference, in a flight into isolation and opposition to other cultures and traditions. That would be to deny not only the universality of the human spirit but also the universality of the Gospel, which is alien to no culture and seeks to take root in all.

4. In *Ecclesia in America* I noted that "it is more necessary than ever for all the faithful to move from a faith of habit...to a faith which is conscious and personally lived. The renewal of faith will always be the best way to lead others to the Truth that is Christ" (No. 73). That is why it is essential in your particular Churches to develop *a new apologetic for your people*, so that they may understand what the Church teaches and thus be able to give reason for their hope (cf. *1 Pt* 3:15). For in a world where people are continuously subjected to the cultural and ideological pressure of the media and the aggressively anti-Catholic attitude of many sects, it is essential for Catholics to know what the Church teaches, to understand that teaching, and to experience its liberating power. A lack of understanding leads to a lack of the spiritual energy needed for Christian living and the work of evangelization.

The Church is called to proclaim an absolute and universal truth to the world at a time when in many cultures there is deep uncertainty as to whether such a truth could possibly exist. Therefore, the Church must speak in ways which carry the force of genuine witness. In considering what this entails, Pope Paul VI identified four qualities, which he called *perspicuitas, lenitas, fiducia, prudentia* – *clarity, humanity, confidence and prudence* (cf. Encyclical Letter *Ecclesiam Suam*, 81).

To speak with *clarity* means that we need to explain comprehensibly the truth of Revelation and the Church's teachings which stem from it. What we teach is not always immediately or easily accessible to people today. For this reason there is a need not simply to repeat but to explain. That is what I meant when I said that we need a new apologetic, geared to the needs of today, which keeps in mind that *our task is not to win arguments but to win souls*, to engage not in ideological bickering but a kind of spiritual warfare, concerned not to vindicate or promote ourselves but to vindicate and promote the Gospel.

Such an apologetic will need to breathe a spirit of *humanity*, that humility and compassion which understand the anxieties and questions of people and, at the same time, do not yield to a sentimentalized sense of the love and compassion of Christ sundered from the truth. We know that the love of Christ can make great demands, precisely because they are tied not to sentimentality but to the truth which alone sets us free (cf. *Jn* 8:32).

To speak with *confidence* will mean that we never lose sight of the absolute and universal truth revealed in Christ, and never lose sight of the fact that this is the truth for which all people long, no

matter how uninterested, resistant or hostile they may seem.

To speak with that practical wisdom and good sense which Paul VI calls prudence and which Gregory the Great considers a virtue of the brave (*Moralia*, 22, 1) will mean that we give a clear answer to people who ask: "What must we do?" (*Lk* 3:10, 12, 14). In this, the heavy responsibility of our episcopal ministry appears in all its demanding challenge. We must daily pray for the light of the Holy Spirit, that we may speak the wisdom of God, not the wisdom of the world, "lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power" (*1 Cor* 1:17).

Pope Paul VI concluded by claiming that to speak with *perspicuitas*, *lenitas*, *fiducia* and *prudentia* "will make us wise; it will make us teachers" (*Ecclesiam Suam*, 83); and that is what we are called to be above all – *teachers of the truth*, who never cease to beg "the grace to see life whole and the power to speak effectively of it" (Gregory the Great, *On Ezekiel*, I, 11, 6).

5. I am convinced, dear Brothers, that many of the problems facing your ministry – including the need for more priestly and religious vocations – will be solved *by daring to give ourselves with still greater generosity to the missionary task*. That was an important goal of the Council, and if there have been internal problems in the Church since then it has been in part perhaps because the Catholic community has been less missionary than the Lord Jesus and the Council intended.

Dear Brother Bishops, *your particular Churches too must be missionary* – in the sense of going out boldly into every corner of Caribbean society, even the darkest of them, armed with the light of the Gospel and the love which knows no bounds. It is time to cast your nets where there may seem to be no fish (cf. *Lk* 5:4-5): *Duc in altum!* In your planning for this mission, it is vital to keep in mind that we must "stake everything on charity" (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 49), for "the century and millennium now beginning will need to see, and hopefully with still greater clarity, to what length of dedication the Christian community can go in charity towards the poorest" (*ibid.*). But it is even more vital that you keep your gaze firmly fixed on Jesus (cf. *Heb* 12:2), never losing sight of him who is *the beginning and the end of all Christian mission*.

Invoking upon you in this Easter season a fresh outpouring of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and entrusting your beloved communities, those "holy seeds of heaven" (Saint Augustine, *Sermon* 34, 5), to the unfailing protection of Mary, Mother of the Redeemer, I impart my Apostolic Blessing to you, the priests, the men and women religious and all the lay faithful of the Caribbean as a pledge of grace and peace in Jesus Christ, the firstborn from the dead.