



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS OF THE PROVINCES
OF PORTLAND IN OREGON, SEATTLE AND ANCHORAGE
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Thursday, 24 June 2004

Dear Brother Bishops,

1. As the visits of the Bishops of the United States of America to the tombs of the Apostles continue, I am pleased to greet you, *the Bishops of the Provinces of Portland in Oregon, Seattle and Anchorage*. In our series of reflections on the exercise of the ministry entrusted to us as successors of the Apostles we have been considering the episcopal *munus docendi* in the light of the Church's *prophetic witness to the Kingdom of God*, of which she is, on earth, the seed and beginning (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 5). In addition to the personal testimony of faith and holiness for which individual believers are responsible by virtue of their Baptism, the Church is also called to give an important *institutional testimony* before the world.

For this reason, the Risen Lord's command to make disciples of all nations and to teach them "to carry out everything I have commanded you" (*Mt 28:19-20*) must be the *indispensable reference point* for every activity of the Church. Her many religious, educational and charitable institutions exist for one reason only: to proclaim the Gospel. Their witness must always proceed *ex corde Ecclesiae*, from the very heart of the Church. It is of utmost importance, therefore, that *the Church's institutions be genuinely Catholic: Catholic in their self understanding and Catholic in their identity*. All those who share in the apostolates of such institutions, including those who are not of the faith, should show a sincere and respectful appreciation of that mission which is their inspiration and ultimate *raison d'être*.

2. Today *creativity* is especially needed in better shaping ecclesial institutions to fulfill their prophetic mission. This means *finding innovative ways to enable the light of Christ to shine brightly*, so that the gift of his grace may truly "make all things new" (*Rev 21:5*; cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 54). The Church's many institutions in the United States – schools, universities, hospitals

and charitable agencies – must not only assist the faithful to think and act fully in accordance with the Gospel, overcoming every separation between faith and life (cf. *Christifideles Laici*, 34), but they must themselves embody *a clear corporate testimony* to its saving truth. This will demand constantly re-examining their priorities in the light of their mission and offering a convincing witness, within a pluralistic society, to the Church's teaching, particularly on respect for human life, marriage and family, and the right ordering of public life.

3. *The Church's educational institutions* will be able to contribute effectively to the new evangelization only if they clearly preserve and foster their Catholic identity. This means that "the content of the education they impart should make constant reference to Jesus Christ and his message as the Church presents it in her dogmatic and moral teaching" (*Ecclesia in America*, 71). Moreover, a truly Catholic education will aim at an *integration of knowledge* within the context of a vision of the human person and the world which is enlightened by the Gospel. By their very nature, *Catholic colleges and universities are called to offer an institutional witness of fidelity to Christ and to his word as it comes to us from the Church*, a public witness expressed in the canonical requirement of the *mandatum* (CIC, c. 812; cf. USCCB, *The Application of Ex Corde Ecclesiae in the United States*, Part 2, art. 4, 4, e). As communities committed to the pursuit of truth and the establishment of a living synthesis of faith and reason, these institutions should be at the forefront of the Church's *dialogue with culture*, for "a faith which remains on the margins of culture would be a faith unfaithful to the fullness of what the word of God manifests and reveals, a truncated faith, and even worse, a faith in the process of self-destruction" (*Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, 44).

The Church's *presence in elementary and secondary education* must also be the object of your special attention as shepherds of the People of God. Local parochial schools have done much to provide solid academic, moral and religious formation for so many Americans, Catholic and non-Catholic alike. I take this opportunity to acknowledge with gratitude the devoted work of countless priests, religious and lay people in the field of Catholic education, and I invite you to join me in encouraging them to persevere in this necessary mission (cf. Congregation for Catholic Education, *Consecrated Persons and their Mission in Schools*, 84). I would also ask you to encourage your priests to continue to be present and visible in parish schools, and to make every effort to ensure that, despite financial difficulties, a Catholic education remains available to the poor and the less privileged in society.

4. *Religious education programs* too are a most significant component of the Church's evangelizing mission. While catechetical programs for children and young people, especially in relation to sacramental preparation, remain essential, *increasing attention must be paid to the particular needs of older adolescents and adults*. Effective programs of religious education, whether on the diocesan or the parish level, require a constant discernment of the actual needs of the different ages and groups, as well as a creative assessment of the best means of meeting them, especially the need for training in mental prayer, the spiritual reading of Scripture (cf. *Dei Verbum*, 11), and the fruitful reception of the sacraments. This continuing discernment calls for the

personal involvement of the Bishop, together with *pastors*, who are directly responsible for the religious instruction imparted in their parishes, with *religious education professionals*, whose generosity and experience are such a great resource in your local Churches, and with *parents*, who are called before all others to form their children in the faith and in Christian living (cf. CIC, c. 774 § 2).

5. The many initiatives of American Catholics on behalf of the elderly, the sick and the needy – through *nursing homes, hospitals, clinics and various relief and assistance centers* – have always been, and continue to be, an eloquent witness to the "faith, hope and love" (1 Cor 13:31) which must mark the life of every disciple of the Lord. In the United States, generations of religious and committed lay people, by building up a network of Catholic health care institutions, have borne outstanding testimony to Christ, the healer of bodies and souls, and to the dignity of the human person. The significant challenges facing these institutions in changing social and economic circumstances must not be allowed to weaken this corporate witness. *Established policies in complete conformity with the Church's moral teaching need to be firmly in place in Catholic health care facilities*, and every aspect of their life ought to reflect their religious inspiration and their intimate link to the Church's mission of bringing supernatural light, healing and hope to men and women at every stage of their earthly pilgrimage.

6. Dear Brothers, with deep gratitude for the great contribution which the Catholic institutions present in your Dioceses have made to the growth of your local Churches, I join you in praying that they will become ever more effective agents of the new evangelization, sources of vital energy for the apostolate, and a true leaven of the Kingdom (cf. Mt 13:33) in American society. Upon all the clergy, religious and lay faithful engaged in works of ecclesial service I invoke the wisdom and strength of the Holy Spirit and cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of grace and strength in the Lord.