



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE NINTH MEETING
OF THE POST-SYNODAL COUNCIL OF THE GENERAL SECRETARIAT
FOR THE SPECIAL ASSEMBLY FOR AMERICA
OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS**

Friday, 5 November 2004

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,

1. It is with joy that I welcome you on the occasion of the ninth meeting of the Post-Synodal Council of the General Secretariat for the Special Assembly for America of the Synod of Bishops.

Your gatherings, organized by the Secretary General of the Synod of Bishops, whom I thank for the kind words addressed to me, allow me to verify the work that has been achieved to implement the teachings found in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in America*. These also provide you with a "measure" to evaluate the goals achieved and the progress made by the particular Churches on the American Continent, whose daily existence is characterized by numerous and varied political, social and economic situations. I thank you and encourage you to continue in this collegial service to the Successor of Peter in the pastoral care of the entire People of God.

2. Starting with the synodal experience, Bishops have promoted various pastoral initiatives aimed at increasing the communion of those who live in America, applying the directives given by the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation. Here, I recall just a few: the "American Missionary Congresses" (C.A.M.), the "Meetings of Bishops of the Church in America" and the celebration of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mother and Evangelizer of America, as a liturgical feast day common to the entire Continent.

There is still much to do to strengthen the Christian identity of the Continent. Although the Catholic

identity predominates in Latin America, in other countries the presence of other Christian confessions is more noticeable. Such diversity, if lived out in fraternal charity, will be a stimulus to an ecumenical dialogue that does not weaken in Catholics "the firm conviction that only in the Catholic Church is found the fullness of the means of salvation established by Jesus Christ" (*Ecclesia in America*, n. 73).

3. Among the present-day challenges, aside from the inauspicious activity of sects, there are other difficulties. For example, the negative consequences of globalization, especially when the economy is made an absolute value; growing urbanization with its inevitable cultural uprooting; drug trafficking and abuse; modern ideologies that hold the concept of family based on matrimony as "old-fashioned"; the progressive gap between the rich and the poor; human-rights violations; migration and the complex problem of the foreign debt. And what can be said about the "culture of death", expressed in countless ways, such as the arms race and the abominable phenomenon of violence unleashed by guerrilla warfare and international terrorism?

4. And so, dear and venerable Brothers, these are some of the urgent challenges facing the Church in America. Thanks be to God, the Christian community can count on many resources to continue its mission with renewed hope. Above all, it can count on faith, a gift that not only formed the Christian identity of the Continent but, in the course of history, surfaced in the moral principles and ideals that have nourished the culture of its Peoples.

Another great gift that divine grace brought to life in America is popular piety, deeply rooted in the different nations. This particular characteristic of the American People, when correctly guided, purified and enriched by genuine elements of Catholic doctrine, can become a useful instrument to help the faithful deal appropriately with the challenges of secularization.

Finally, the Church in America has been enriched with the gift of a unique social sensibility, especially towards the poor, which can be seen in a deep solidarity between peoples and cultures. I recall that it was precisely the Synodal Fathers of the Special Assembly for America who proposed that a "*Catechism of Catholic Social Doctrine*" be written; I welcomed this proposal in which the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation was recently completed by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, with the publication of the "*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*".

5. Dear Brothers, I wish you complete success in your work, upon which I invoke the protection of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mother of America. To her I ask that the Church on that Continent may flourish and that its fruits of holiness, sincere conversion to Christ, solid communion and solidarity may grow.

With these sentiments I bless you, your communities and the entire Continent, and I pray to God that its unity may be more deeply anchored in the Christian faith.

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