



The Holy See

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

Monday, 13 September 2004

*Your Eminence,
Dear Brother Bishops,*

1. "What we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord with ourselves as servants" (2 Cor 4:5). With these telling words of Saint Paul I cordially welcome you, *the Bishops of New Zealand*, and thank Bishop Browne for the kind sentiments expressed on your behalf. I warmly reciprocate them and assure you of my prayers for yourselves and those entrusted to your pastoral care. Your first visit *ad Limina Apostolorum* in this new millennium is an occasion to give thanks to God for the immense gift of faith in Jesus Christ so treasured by the peoples of your country (cf. *Ecclesia in Oceania*, 1). That same faith, for which Saints Peter and Paul shed their blood, saw from the earliest centuries the Church of Rome as "the ultimate reference of communion" (*Pastores Gregis*, 57). Coming to see Peter (cf. *Gal* 1:18) from an island nation so distant, you attest to the strength of that communion which "safeguards legitimate differences and yet is vigilant to ensure that particularity not only does not harm unity but serves it" (*Pastores Gregis*, 57). 2. New Zealand enjoys a proud heritage, steeped in rich cultural diversity, yet like many other countries is today suffering the effects of unrestrained secularism. This radical "split between the Gospel and culture" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 20) is manifested as a "crisis of meaning" (cf. *Fides et Ratio*, 81): the distortion of reason by particular interest groups and exaggerated individualism are examples of this perspective of life which neglects the search for the ultimate goal and meaning of human existence. Your own reports indeed unequivocally indicate the pressing need for Christ's liberating message in a society experiencing the tragic consequences of the eclipse of the sense of God: the drift away from the Church; the undermining of family life; the facilitation of abortion and prostitution; a misguided vision of life which seeks pleasure and "success" rather than goodness and wisdom.

Faced with such disquieting developments, New Zealanders look to you to *be men of hope, preaching and teaching with passion the splendour of Christ's truth which dispels the darkness and illuminates the true path of life*. Know that the Lord himself is close to you! Listen to his voice: "Courage! It is I! Have no fear" (*Mk 6:50*). With your hearts and minds firmly fixed on Christ, I am confident that you will lead others from the limitations of shallow thinking into the open radiance of God's love. Indeed, it is only by contemplating the unfathomed beauty of humanity's final destiny – eternal life in heaven – that the multitude of daily joys and sorrows can be adequately explained, enabling people to embrace life's challenges with the confidence born of faith and hope.

3. All the faithful of Aotearoa, through their baptismal vocation, are called to share in your witness to the hope that the Church holds (cf. *1 Pt 3:15*). There is no better way to do this than through joyful participation in worship. *Sunday Mass*, beyond the fulfilment of a solemn obligation, *is a glorious epiphany of the Church* in which the holy People of God, actively and fully sharing in the same liturgical celebration (cf. *Dies Domini*, 34), testify to the "supreme day of faith", "an indispensable day", "the day of Christian hope!"

The weakening in Sunday Mass observance, of which each of you has spoken with profound concern, dims the light of witness to Christ's presence in your country. When Sunday becomes subordinate to a popular concept of "weekend" and is unduly dominated by entertainment and sport, rather than being truly sanctified and revitalized, people remain trapped in a relentless and often meaningless pursuit of novelty and fail to experience the freshness of Christ's "living water" (*Jn 4:11*). In this regard, echoing the words found in the Letter to the Hebrews, I join you in urging the laity of New Zealand – and in a special way the young people – to remain faithful to the celebration of Sunday Mass: "hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, ... not neglecting to meet together ... but encouraging one another" (*Heb 10:23-25*).

4. From her sacred liturgy, the Church draws strength and inspiration for her mission to evangelize. This was expressed with great clarity during the Synod for Oceania: *the "purpose of being with Jesus is to go forth from Jesus, in his power and with his grace"* (*Ecclesia in Oceania*, 3). This dynamic, articulated during the Prayer after Communion and the Concluding Rite of every Mass (cf. *Dies Domini*, 45), directs every Christian to the task of the evangelization of culture. It is a duty that no single believer can ignore. Sent by the Lord himself into the vineyard – the home, schools, the workplace, civic organizations – Christ's disciples find no time for "standing idle in the marketplace" (*Mt 20:3*), nor can they be so absorbed by the internal aspects of parish life that they are distracted from the command to evangelize others actively (cf. *Christifideles Laici*, 2). Spurred on by word and strengthened by sacrament, the followers of Jesus must return to their "vineyard" burning with a desire to "speak" of Christ and to "show" him to the world (cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 16). Dear Brothers, your own pastoral letters are a fine example of the way in which you earnestly seek to present the truth of Christ in the public arena. The cordial relations which you have diligently developed with the government authorities allow you to be firm in your appraisal of their deliberations when necessary. In this regard, I encourage you to continue to ensure that your

statements clearly convey the whole of the Church's magisterial teaching. Among the many challenges currently confronting you in this regard is the need to *defend the sanctity and uniqueness of marriage*. Established by the Creator with its own nature and purpose, preserved in natural moral law, and given expression in all cultures, the institution of marriage necessarily entails the complementarity of husbands and wives who participate in God's creative activity through the bearing and raising of children. Spouses rightly deserve specific and categorical legal recognition by the State, while any attempt to equate marriage with other forms of cohabitation violates its unique role in God's plan for humanity.

5. Within the context of the evangelization of culture, I wish to acknowledge the outstanding contribution of your Catholic schools. Their growth has enriched the faith of the Christian community and contributed to the promotion of excellence in the nation. The worth of our schools cannot, however, be measured simply in numbers. *Catholic schools today must be active agents of evangelization at the heart of parish life!* To this end I appeal directly to the generous and sincere young faithful of New Zealand: Enter into your religious education with enthusiasm! Listen to the voice of Jesus calling you to share in the life of his family, the Church! Take up your rightful place in parish life!

Catechesis and religious education today is a taxing apostolate. I thank and encourage those many lay men and women, together with Religious, who with unstinting dedication strive to ensure that "the baptized ... become daily more appreciative of the gift of faith which they have received" (*Gravissimum Educationis*, 2). As Bishops, it is your grave obligation to *assist teachers to deepen their personal witness to Jesus Christ among the young and to grow in their readiness to teach pupils to pray*, thereby enriching their contribution to the specific nature and mission of Catholic education. This demands, particularly for specialist teachers, a solid theological and spiritual preparation that is in harmony with that of your priests; it also points to the need to *ensure that your tertiary education chaplaincies are vibrant sources of sound catechesis*. Here I wish also to make a special appeal to the apostolic Religious: strengthen your commitment to the educational and school apostolate! In places where the young are easily lured away from the path of truth and genuine freedom, the consecrated person's witness to the evangelical counsels is a marvellous and irreplaceable gift.

6. Dear Brothers, you have assiduously promoted collaboration in your leadership of the Church in New Zealand, making it possible for "all to journey together along the common path of faith and mission" (*Pastores Gregis*, 44). *Authentic collaboration never weakens the clear and unequivocal right and duty of governance which pertains to the munus episcopale but rather is one of the fruits of its fullness*. I know you are selflessly assisted by your priests for whose pastoral generosity and commitment I join you in thanking the Lord. Assure them that the Christian faithful depend upon and are greatly appreciative of them. Similarly, Religious Priests, Brothers and Sisters need to be encouraged as they too seek to foster ecclesial communion by their cooperative presence and apostolate in your Dioceses. As a gift to the Church, the consecrated life lies at her very heart,

manifesting the deep beauty of the Christian vocation to selfless, sacrificial love. In accord with your endeavours to promote a "culture of vocation", I urge Religious to propose afresh to young people the ideal of consecration and mission found in the various states of ecclesial life which together exist "that the world may believe" (*Jn 17:21*).

7. With affection and fraternal gratitude I offer these reflections to you and encourage you to share the fruits of the charism of truth which the Spirit has bestowed upon you. United in your proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ and guided by the example of the Saints, go forward in hope! Invoking upon you the intercession of Mary, "Star of the New Evangelization", I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing to you and the priests, Religious, and lay faithful of your dioceses.