



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE BISHOPS OF BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Friday, 24 February 2006

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,

"Blessed are the peacemakers" (Mt 5: 9). I cordially greet you with Jesus' words at the end of your visit *ad limina Apostolorum*. Through you, I would also like to extend my greeting to the faithful whom the divine Teacher has entrusted to your pastoral care.

Thank you, Cardinal Vinko Puljic, for your words on behalf of the other Bishops of Bosnia and Herzegovina, expressing to me at the same time the sentiments of the respective communities.

In telling me about the situation of your faithful, in addition to the problematic aspects of their daily lives, you have brought to the fore the elements of hope that their commitment justifies and the pastoral programmes you are developing.

Our Meetings have enabled me to detect in you a strong desire to foster communion of intentions in order to face in a united manner the current challenges with which your people must deal. Of course, there are numerous difficulties, but you place great trust in divine Providence, as do your priests and faithful.

After the grievous years of the recent war, you are called today as peacemakers to strengthen communion and to spread compassion, understanding and forgiveness in Christ's Name, both within the Christian communities and throughout the social fabric of Bosnia and Herzegovina. I know well that yours is not an easy mission, but I also know that you keep your gaze constantly fixed on Christ, who, having loved everyone to the very end, assigned to his disciples a fundamental duty that sums up all the others: the duty to love.

To be spiritually fruitful, love must not simply abide by earthly laws but must let itself be illumined by the truth which is God and must be expressed in that superior measure of justice which is mercy.

If you work in this spirit, you will successfully carry out the mission entrusted to you, helping to heal the wounds that are still gaping and to settle disputes and disagreements, a legacy of past years.

Impelled by Christ's love, you are determined not to lose confidence despite the pressing problems that beset you. I am referring to the situation of the exiles, for whom I hope appropriate agreements will be concluded that guarantee respect for the rights of all.

I am thinking in particular of the necessary equality of citizens of different religions, of the urgent need for measures to deal with the increasing lack of employment for young people, of the need to ease the threatening tensions between races, a legacy of the complex historical events experienced in your territory.

The Apostolic See is close to you, as is proven by the recent nomination of a resident Nuncio who will be able to be in permanent contact with the various institutions of the Country.

Increasing unity of Christ's flock

Dear and venerable Brothers, may you feel a living part of the Mystical Body of Christ. You can count on the prayerful, concrete and affectionate solidarity of the Holy See and of the entire Catholic Church.

As I thank you for the attentive ministry you carry out, I would like to reflect on certain concerns that you yourselves have expressed regarding some aspects of life in your Dioceses.

It is important first of all that every effort be constantly made to increase the unity of Christ's flock: between you, the legitimate Pastors, and the Religious, especially those who carry out a pastoral ministry in diocesan territory; between diocesan clergy and consecrated persons; lastly, between all who serve the Christian people, overcoming, if necessary, misunderstandings and difficulties linked to past events.

The Church everywhere pursues a single goal: to build the Kingdom of God in every land and every heart. The task of keeping the Lord's heritage intact, adhering faithfully to the Church's doctrinal and spiritual patrimony in its entirety, is entrusted to the Successors of the Apostles and to their collaborators in their pastoral ministry.

Blessed are the peacemakers! These words aptly apply to internal relations among the Church's members as well as to her external mission. The various ecclesial bodies, in their legitimate parts,

are regulated by canonical norms which are an expression of an age-old experience and have received help from on high in their development. It is up to the Bishop, the father of the community entrusted to him by Christ, to discern what serves to build up Christ's Church.

In this regard, the Bishop is a "pontefice", that is, a "builder of bridges" between the different needs of the Ecclesial Community. And this is a particularly important aspect of episcopal ministry at the present time when Bosnia and Herzegovina is resuming their journey of collaboration to build a future of social development and peace.

Venerable Brothers, the Successor of Peter is beside you and assures you of his constant support. These days that you have spent in Rome, the Meetings you have had with me and with my collaborators in the Roman Curia, have enabled you to experience how sincere and brotherly our spiritual closeness is.

I pray to the Lord that he will pour out an abundance of his graces upon you, upon your priests, the men and women religious, and upon the entire People of your Country. I entrust this prayer to the intercession of Mary, Mother of God and of the Church, so that she may intercede on behalf of all her children.

With these sentiments I impart my Apostolic Blessing to you and warmly extend it to your communities, to the Catholic faithful and to all the people of good will in beloved Bosnia and Herzegovina.

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