



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE MEMBERS OF THE INTERNATIONAL
BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF STS CYRIL AND METHODIUS
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Friday, 4 May 2007

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope" (Rom 15: 13).

I am happy to welcome you with these words from St Paul's Letter to the Romans: yes, may the God of hope fill you with his heavenly consolations!

With this greeting, I offer each one of you a fraternal embrace, beloved Pastors of a part of the Lord's flock that is particularly dear to me! You come from different countries, with a variety of races, cultures and languages, whose Ecclesial Communities are nonetheless linked to the same faith in the Risen Christ passed down to us by the Apostles. Welcome!

I greet each one of you as I warmly express my gratitude for his kind words to Archbishop Stanislav Hocevar, President of your International Bishops' Conference of Sts Cyril and Methodius, established in December 2004 by my Predecessor, Servant of God John Paul II.

Your President expressed the sentiments of communion that bind you to the Successor of Peter: I am grateful to you. This house is also your own; in it you can experience the catholicity of Christ's Church which extends her tent to the very ends of the earth. At the end of your *ad limina Apostolorum* visit, I renew to you the expression of my cordial gratitude, which I also ask you to convey to your communities on whose prayerful support I confidently rely.

Please assure them all - priests, men and women religious, children and young people, the elderly

and families - that the Pope is close to them and every day remembers them to the Lord.

I urge everyone to persevere in unity, in reciprocal openness and in the spirit of brotherhood. The different countries and social and religious contexts in which your faithful live, venerable Brothers, have many repercussions on their Christian life.

I am thinking, for example, of marriage between spouses of different denominations or religions; they require of you, dear Pastors, special spiritual care and a more harmonious cooperation with the other Christian Churches.

I am furthermore thinking of the religious education of the new generations which should be provided for in school curricula, as is only right. And then how can I fail to mention that aspect which is fundamental for ecclesial life: the formation of sacred ministers and their spiritual guidance in the multiconfessional context mentioned above?

I know that a Major Seminary at Subotica is being planned. I warmly encourage this initiative because of the good service it will be able to give the various Dioceses.

It is necessary to help seminarians to develop the clear awareness that a priest is an "*alter Christus*", who must cultivate an intimate relationship with Jesus if he wishes to carry out his mission properly and not to consider himself a mere "official" of an ecclesiastical organization.

The priest is totally at the service of the Church, a living and spiritual body which does not draw her energy from nationalistic, ethnic or political elements but from the action of Christ present in her ministers.

Indeed, the Lord wanted his Church to be open to all; this is how the Apostles built her up when Christianity was taking its first steps and the martyrs witnessed with their blood to her holiness and "catholicity". Down the centuries, Tradition kept intact her character of universality as she continued to spread and to come into contact with different languages, races, nationalities and cultures. For you, this unity in diversity of the Church is a daily experience.

Dear and venerable Brothers, during these days I have been able to become better acquainted with the situations of your Dioceses that are often composed of a small flock set in the vast context of a multiplicity of races, cultures and religions. Thus, your mission is far from easy! Yet, with the Lord's help and in docility to his Spirit you urge all whom he has entrusted to your care never to tire of being the Gospel "leaven" that ferments society.

In this way, you will be able together, in line with the Apostle Peter's exhortation, to account for the hope that is in you (1 Pt 3: 15). You will do this by means of constant faithfulness to Christ, diligent administration of the sacraments and generous apostolic dedication.

To this end, you will need to involve every member of the People of God, using every available means of Christian formation, prepared in the different languages of the population.

This kind of shared pastoral action cannot fail to have beneficial effects also in the civil context. Indeed, upright consciences formed in accordance with the Gospel will be more easily spurred to build a society on a human scale.

An incorrectly understood concept of modernity is tending today to excessively exalt the needs of the individual to the detriment of every person's duties to God and to the community to which he belongs. It is important, for example, to shed light on the correct conception of civil and public responsibility, since the commitment to respect each person's rights and for a convinced integration of one's own culture with others stems precisely from this vision and from striving together for the common good.

Providence has set your peoples in the context of a European Continent that is being restructured. Your Churches also feel they share in this historic process, knowing well that they can make their own special contribution.

Unfortunately, obstacles are not lacking: the scarcity of available means because of the economic situation and the diminutive number of Catholic forces might discourage you.

It is far from easy to forget the burdensome legacy of more than 40 years of unilateral thinking that has given rise to forms of social behaviour in which freedom and personal responsibility are wanting.

At the same time, it is difficult to resist the temptations of Western materialism, with the risk of relativism and ethical liberalism, radicalism and political fundamentalism.

Do not lose heart but rather, join forces and patiently persevere in your work, certain that one day, with God's help, it will be possible to gather in the fruits that he himself will bring to maturity in accordance with his mysterious plans of salvation.

I am anxious at this moment to assure you that the Pope is close to you and encourages you to carry on, trusting in the help of the Lord, the Good Shepherd.

Dear Brothers, always stay beside your faithful: they need wise teachers, holy Pastors and reliable guides who, setting an example, lead them on the journey of total adherence to Christ.

Be united with one another, care for vocations to the priesthood and to the consecrated life; be helpful to your pastoral workers; encourage lay people to assume their proper responsibilities in the civil and ecclesial contexts in accordance with the spirit of *Gaudium et Spes*, so that their

witness may be harmonious and truly Catholic.

The Lord has put you in close contact with our Orthodox brothers and sisters: as a member of one Body, seek every possible opportunity for collaboration at the service of the one Kingdom of God. Nor should you be unwilling to collaborate with the other Christian confessions and with every person of good will in order to encourage all that can serve to disseminate the Gospel values.

Dear and venerable Brothers, at this meeting I wished to highlight certain aspects of the life of your Communities which came to the fore at our individual meetings. As I take my leave of you, I express to you once again my affection and assure you of my prayers.

While I invoke the heavenly protection of Mary, Queen of the Apostles, and of Sts Cyril and Methodius, Patrons of your International Bishops' Conference, I impart to you all a cordial Apostolic Blessing, which I gladly extend to all the faithful entrusted to your pastoral care.

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