



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE BISHOPS OF THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE
OF LAOS AND CAMBODIA ON THEIR "AD LIMINA VISIT"***

Castel Gandolfo

Thursday, 6 September 2007

*Dear Brothers in the Episcopate
and in the Priesthood,*

It is a great joy for me to meet you here in the days of your *ad limina* visit to the tombs of the Apostles. Thus, gathered round the Successor of Peter, you express the communion of the Church in Laos and of the Church in Cambodia with the universal Church.

I thank Bishop Emile Destombes, Vicar Apostolic of Phnom Penh and President of your Bishops' Conference, for his words on your behalf, presenting to me the ecclesial situations in your Countries.

When you return to Laos and to Cambodia, I ask you to convey the affectionate greeting of the Successor of Peter to the priests, men and women religious, catechists and lay people of your communities. I know of their hardships and of the inner strength which they have all shown in order to live in fidelity to the Lord Jesus and his Church.

Today, I invite them to stand firm in the faith and to witness generously to God's love for all their brethren.

I also offer a cordial greeting to the Laotian People and to the Cambodian People; I encourage them to persevere in their endeavours to build an increasingly fraternal society, ever more open to others, where all may avail themselves of the gifts received from the Creator.

Dear Brothers, you are exercising your ministry at the service of the Church in conditions that are often difficult and in extremely varied situations. In your service to the People of God, you may rest assured of my brotherly support and that of the universal Church!

Indeed, "if we must say that a Bishop is never alone, inasmuch as he is always united to the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit, we must also add that he is also never alone because he is always and continuously united with his brothers in the episcopate and with the one whom the Lord has chosen as the Successor of Peter" (*Pastores Gregis*, n. 8).

The deep communion with one another that you demonstrate and your collaboration, when possible, expressed in various ways, are a precious help in your pastoral task for the good of the people entrusted to your care.

Your closeness to the faithful, especially the loneliest, is an encouragement for them to persevere, steadfast in the Christian faith, and to grow in discovering the Person of Christ despite the difficulties of daily life.

The help you receive in various areas from those Churches which date back to the first evangelization, especially for apostolic personnel or formation, is also an eloquent sign of the solidarity that disciples of Christ must show to one another.

I warmly greet the priests, your associates in Gospel proclamation, particularly those whose vocation developed in the Christian communities of your Countries. In collaboration with the missionaries, to whom I also express my gratitude for having brought Jesus' message and the gift of faith, they guide the People of God with zeal and self-denial.

May they all, through a deeply spiritual and exemplary life, continue to bear an eloquent witness to the Gospel in the Church and in society!

I also hope that your efforts to promote priestly and religious vocations will bear abundant fruit, directed to the proclamation of Jesus Our Saviour, by taking into account your peoples' sensitivity and making it understandable for their respective mindset and culture.

In this perspective, special care must be taken, even at the price of sacrifices in other areas, to guarantee future priests a sound human, spiritual, theological and pastoral formation.

In fact, one of the important issues you have to face in your pastoral ministry is the proclamation of the Christian faith in a specific culture.

The recent celebration of the 450th anniversary of the Church's presence in Cambodia is an opportunity for the faithful to acquire an ever deeper awareness of the long history of Christians in the region. This history is marked by the generous and at times heroic gift of their lives offered by

numerous disciples of Christ for the Gospel to be proclaimed and lived.

"Jesus is the Good News for the men and women of every time and place in their search for the meaning of existence and for the truth of their own humanity" (*Ecclesia in Asia*, n. 14).

In proclaiming this to all peoples, the Church is not attempting to impose herself but is witnessing to her esteem for the human being and the society in which she lives.

In the social and religious context of your region, it is especially important that Catholics show their own identity, while respecting the religious traditions and cultures of other peoples.

This identity must be expressed in the first place through an authentic spiritual experience that is rooted in the reception of the Word of God and the sacraments of the Church.

Members of Institutes of Consecrated Life, whose major involvement in pastoral work and in the service to the most deprived you emphasized in your reports, are those primarily responsible for reminding everyone of God's primacy and for helping "the Church to reveal ever more deeply her nature as the sacrament "of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind"" (*Vita Consecrata*, n. 46).

In this perspective, one priority is the formation of the faithful, particularly of women religious and catechists with whose courageous commitment to the service of the Gospel I am familiar.

They will thus become evangelizers who can respond to the challenges of society, strengthened by the truth of Christ. Indeed, for the vitality of the Christian communities their role is of paramount importance.

Together with priests, they contribute their specific and indispensable contribution to the life and mission of the Church. May they be authentic witnesses of Christ everywhere, carrying out with serenity and conviction the tasks entrusted to them!

Moreover, their steadfast Christian faith enables them to engage in an authentic dialogue with the members of other religions in order to work together to build up your Countries and to foster the common good.

I also encourage you to develop the education of young people in your communities. In order to take on their Christian engagements they are often confronted by complex situations in social life that demand specific pastoral attention.

In particular, an appropriate preparation for Christian marriage is indispensable if the young are to be able to withstand social pressures and develop the human and spiritual qualities required to

establish themselves as united and harmonious couples.

May they learn to preserve family values such as "filial respect, love and care for the aged and the sick, love of children and harmony [which] are held in high esteem in all Asian cultures and religious traditions" (*Ecclesia in Asia*, n. 46).

The young must find in their own families the normal place in which to grow humanly and spiritually. I therefore hope that families will always be true centres of evangelization where each one can experience the love of God that may then be communicated to others and first of all to children.

The Christian community's courageous commitment to the most underprivileged is also a special sign of the authenticity of its faith. The population and the Authorities appreciate the Church's social institutions, which are able to develop especially because of ecclesial solidarity and the support of the Representations of the Holy See in your Countries. They show eloquently God's love for all people without distinction.

In fact, love of neighbour, rooted in love of God, is an essential duty for the Christian community and for each one of its members.

Nonetheless, as I wrote in the Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, "It is very important that the Church's charitable activity maintain all of its splendour and does not become just another form of social assistance" (n. 31).

I assure all who are involved in the Church's charitable works of my gratitude, particularly the women religious dedicated to the service of the most underprivileged with competence and devotion, who give each person heartfelt attention, the result of an active faith.

Dear Brothers, at the end of our meeting, I would like to ask you to look to the future, allowing yourselves to be guided by Christ and placing your hope in him, for "hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (*Rom 5: 5*).

I entrust each one of your communities to the motherly intercession of the Virgin Mary, model of all disciples; may she protect you and lead you on the paths of her Son.

I warmly impart my Apostolic Blessing to you and to the priests, the men and women religious, the catechists and all the lay people in your Countries.

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