



The Holy See

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

Thursday, 6 March 2008

*Your Eminence,
Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,*

It is a cause of great joy to me to receive you this morning on the occasion of the *ad limina* visit with which you are renewing the bonds of communion of your particular Churches with the Bishop of Rome. I am grateful for the words that Bishop Pablo Vizcaíno Prado of Suchitepéquez-Retalhuleu, President of the Bishops' Conference, has addressed to me on your behalf and I greet you all with affection, as I ask you to convey my esteem to the beloved Guatemalan People. The meetings I have had with each one of you have brought me close to the daily life and aspirations of your compatriots, as well as to the attentive pastoral work you carry out in your Nation.

Your Pastors' hearts are full of concern at the increase of violence and the poverty that affects broad sectors of the population, causing a steady exodus of emigrants to other countries with serious consequences in the areas of personal and family life. This situation requires you to renew your efforts to show everyone the merciful Face of the Lord, whose image the Church is called to be, accompanying and serving with generosity and self-denial especially those who are suffering and who are the most forsaken. In fact, charity and assistance to our needy brethren are "a part of [the Church's] nature, an indispensable expression of her very being" (cf. *Deus Caritas Est*, n. 25a).

God has blessed the Guatemalan People with deep religious feeling, rich in popular expressions, which must develop in solid Christian communities that joyfully celebrate their faith as living members of the Body of Christ (cf. I Cor 12: 27), faithful to the foundation of the Apostles. You know very well that firmness of faith and participation in the sacraments strengthen your faithful

against the risk of the sects or of groups that claim to be charismatic but that create a sense of confusion and can endanger ecclesial communion.

Your cultural traditions find in the family, the fundamental cell of society, the basic nucleus of life and of the transmission of faith and values, but is today having to contend with serious pastoral and human challenges. The Church, therefore, always dedicates special attention to imparting a solid formation to couples preparing for marriage, constantly instilling faith and hope in families and watching to ensure that with the necessary assistance they can carry out their responsibilities. In your ministry, you rely on the valuable collaboration of your priests who must regard their Bishop as a true father and teacher, very close to them, in whom they may find help in their spiritual and material needs as well as helpful advice in times of difficulty. They are constantly in need of encouragement in order to persevere as true men of prayer on the path to authentic priestly holiness (cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, n. 32). They also need the adequate means to broaden their human and theological formation, which will enable them to take on particularly sensitive roles such as those of professor, formation teacher or spiritual director in your seminaries. Following your example and pastoral zeal, they must be a living call to young and older men to give themselves entirely to the Lord, collaborating with divine grace so that the Lord may "send out labourers into his harvest" (Mt 9: 38).

The Second American Missionary Congress celebrated in Guatemala in 2003 involved the challenge of bringing to the dioceses and vicariates a more intense experience of missionary commitment and included this in the new general plan of the Bishops' Conference. Today, also in the light of the conclusions of the Fifth General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops' Conferences in Aparecida, you must reinforce your identity and set yourselves to fulfil the evangelizing commitments that you made there. Thus, precisely as my venerable Predecessor John Paul II did during his first Visit to your Country, I encourage you to persevere with a renewed spirit in the Church's evangelizing mission in the context of the current cultural changes and globalization, giving fresh enthusiasm to preaching and catechesis, proclaiming Jesus Christ, Son of God, as the foundation and *raison d'être* of every believer. The evangelization of cultures is a priority undertaking if the Word of God is to be made accessible to all and, accepted in minds and hearts, to be light that illuminates and water that purifies with the Gospel message which brings salvation to the entire human race.

As I bring this meeting to a close, I would like to encourage you to persevere in guiding the People of God entrusted to your care. May the Church, through your words and example, continue to shine as a source of hope for one and all. Please convey my affectionate greeting and my Blessing to your priests, Religious and all other faithful, especially those who collaborate with greater dedication in the work of evangelization. I invoke upon them and you the motherly protection of Our Lady of the Rosary, Patroness of Guatemala, and I warmly impart my Apostolic Blessing to you all.

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