



The Holy See

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

Friday, 23 May 2008

Dear and Venerable Brothers,

I greet you all together with great joy while you are making your pilgrimage *ad limina Apostolorum*. It is a timely opportunity for the Successor of Peter to become acquainted with the apostolic challenges you are meeting in the beloved land of Albania. I greet you with affection and thank you for the spontaneous frankness with which you have made the Pope aware of the complex reality of the Church in Albania, with its difficulties and hopes. I express special gratitude for the words with which the President of your Bishops' Conference has expressed your sentiments to me, summarizing your common vision. Thank you, my dear Brothers in the Episcopate! And welcome!

The sad heritage left in Albania by a past dictatorial regime which proclaimed atheism as the State ideology is known to all. It is obvious that such an anti-democratic structure of relations between citizens has already left you with a humanly difficult task, namely, the rediscovery of a common grammar that can once again support the building of society. However, as successors of the Apostles, you are called above all to bear witness to another particularly beneficial and constructive heritage, the message of salvation brought into the world by Christ. In this regard, after the dark night of the Communist dictatorship which was incapable of understanding the Albanian people with their ancestral traditions, it was providentially possible for the Church to be born anew. This was partly thanks to the apostolic energy of my Venerable Predecessor, the Servant of God John Paul II who visited you in 1993 and re-established the Catholic Hierarchy on a sound basis for the good of believers and the benefit of the Albanian People.

One of the great Pontiff's first acts was to recognize the heroes of the faith. I recall here in particular the splendid witness of Cardinal Koliqi, the leader of a large throng of martyrs. The

reconstruction of the Catholic Hierarchy was the dutiful recognition of the intimate union that binds your people to Christ and helps to make room for the new strength of Catholicism in the land of Albania. You are the custodians of this bond and it is primarily your task to promote in your actions and initiatives the unity which must show the fundamental and vivifying mystery of the one Body of Christ, in communion with the ministry of the Successor of Peter. It is impossible not to see, in this perspective, how essential the common feeling and shared co-responsibility of the Bishops is, precisely in order to face the problems and difficulties of the Church in Albania effectively. How could one imagine a diocesan approach that did not take into account the opinion of the other Bishops, whose agreement is necessary in order to respond appropriately to the expectations of the one people whom the Church addresses?

Cordial and brotherly understanding between Pastors can only bring great benefits to the beloved Albanian People, at the social, ecumenical and interreligious levels. Therefore, venerable Brothers, be one in Christ in proclaiming the Gospel and in celebrating the divine Mysteries; make communion with the universal Church manifest in the broadest and most genuine episcopal brotherhood. It would be inconceivable for one Pastor to undertake approaching concrete situations without seeking to coordinate his own commitment with that of his Brother Bishops. Specific issues exist that can be traced back to contingent problems which it is necessary to solve, with the help of all, in the context of charity and pastoral patience. I urge all of you to use evangelical prudence with an attitude of authentic charity, recalling that the ecclesial canons are a means of promoting communion in Christ and the superior good of the Redeemer's one flock in an orderly manner. This also concerns evangelization as well as catechetical activity, and is expressed in commitment in the social context. I am thinking in particular of holiness, education, the effort to pacify souls and all that fosters positive collaboration between the different members of society and their respective religious traditions.

The phenomenon of emigration, both in the Country and outside it, poses serious pastoral problems for you which challenge your hearts as Bishops, not only with regard to the faithful who live in your territory but also those in the diaspora. This calls into question your ability to dialogue with your Brothers in other countries so that you may offer the necessary and urgent pastoral assistance. I know of the problem of the lack of clergy. I also know of the generosity of many of your priests who are active in precarious situations, striving to carry out the proper ministerial service for Catholic faithful of Albanian origin who are abroad. This does you honour dear Brothers, who in accordance with the Heart of Christ show your concern for the spiritual plight of your people even beyond the boundaries of your Homeland. Moreover, it also does honour to the priests who generously share in your pastoral concerns.

Then there are many practical problems that require the effective contribution of the civil bodies by means of proposals that not only respond to political concerns but also take the actual social situations into account. From the Catholic viewpoint, both in the Homeland and in the context of emigration, you must develop an attention which, while preserving your people's specific identity,

does not neglect their integration in the social contexts where they arrive. In this perspective, it is necessary to cultivate, especially in priests destined to provide pastoral care for emigrants, a deep sense of belonging to the one Body of Christ, which is identical in every corner of the earth in all of them. Saying this, venerable Brothers, means reaffirming the persistent need for the constant care of those whom the Lord calls to follow him. May vocations promotion thus always be a top priority concern for you: the future of the Church in Albania depends on this.

Lastly, I would like to express my congratulations on the Agreements recently signed with the Authorities of the Republic: I am confident that these measures can serve the spiritual reconstruction of the Country, given the positive role that the Church carries out in society. For my part, I encourage you to continue in your ministry, to bring to completion the programmes you have agreed on together. As I entrust you to the heavenly intercession of Mary, Mother of Good Counsel, I gladly impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you, to the priests, the men and women religious and all the faithful entrusted to your pastoral care.

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