



The Holy See

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

Consistory Hall, Papal Summer Residence, Castel Gandolfo
Friday, 19 September 2008

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

"We give thanks to God always for you all, constantly mentioning you in our prayers" (1 Thes 1: 2). St Paul's words express my sentiments on receiving you for your *ad limina* visit, which expresses the strong ties that unite the respective particular Churches with the Successor of St Peter, Head of the Episcopal College (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 22).

I thank Bishop José Luis Lacunza Maestrojuán of David, President of your Bishops' Conference, for his kind words on behalf of you all, sharing with me the joys and aspirations you carry in your hearts and the challenges you are preparing to face. Know that the Pope walks beside you as you carry out your duties. Thus, when you return to your country, please convey my spiritual closeness to the Bishops emeritus, to the priests and religious communities, the seminarians and the lay faithful, especially the neediest, and tell them that I pray for them, asking God to ensure that they do not fail in their work for the Gospel and that they continue with their words and with their life, to urge all to find their happiness in following Christ and in sharing with others the joy that is born from the knowledge that he loves us to the end (cf. Jn 13: 1).

Through reading your quinquennial reports and the conversations we had, I have come to organize initiatives aimed at sowing the Word of God generously in the hearts of Panamanians, in order to accompany them on the path of maturation in the faith so that they may be authentic disciples and missionaries of Jesus Christ. In this regard, following the guidelines of the Fifth General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops' Conferences, celebrated in Aparecida, you are intensifying your pastoral action also in view of the celebrations that you are preparing for the commemoration of the fifth centenary of the country's evangelization, which you

are preparing to celebrate in the year 2013. This work is a providential opportunity to reinforce ecclesial communion among the dioceses of Panama.

One cause for joy is the fruitful missionary action of the priests, religious and lay people, which counters the growing secularization of society as a configuration of the world and of humanity that relegates transcendence to the margins which is invading every aspect of daily life, developing a mindset in which God is indeed absent from human life and awareness. Moreover, the means of social communication are often used to spread individualism, hedonism, ideologies and customs that undermine the very foundations of marriage, the family and Christian morality. The disciple of Christ finds the strength to respond to these challenges in the deep knowledge and sincere love of the Lord Jesus, in meditation on Sacred Scripture, in an appropriate doctrinal and spiritual formation, in constant prayer, in the frequent reception of the sacrament of Reconciliation, in the conscious and active participation in Holy Mass and in the practice of works of charity and mercy.

This is important, especially for the new generations. The memory of my venerable Predecessor, the Servant of God John Paul II, in this year in which the 25th anniversary of his Visit to your beloved nation is being commemorated, can serve as an incentive to dedicate yourselves with zeal to the pastoral care of youth and vocations so that there will be no lack of priests to bring the people of Panama to Christ, the source of life in abundance for those who encounter him (cf. Jn 10: 10). In this regard I ask them to pray confidently to the "Lord of the harvest" to send numerous holy vocations to the priesthood (cf. Lk 10: 2). This also requires a correct discernment of candidates for the priesthood, as well as apostolic zeal and the witness of communion and brotherhood among priests. This way of life must already be inculcated at the Seminary, where priority should be given to a serious academic discipline, the room and time for daily prayer, a dignified celebration of the liturgy, adequate spiritual direction and the intense cultivation of the human, Christian and priestly virtues. In this way, by praying and studying, seminarians can build within themselves the man of God whom the faithful have the right to see in their ministers.

The history of Panama has been marked by the praiseworthy work of numerous missionaries and by the generous concern of men and women religious. May these luminous models encourage consecrated people at the present time to make their lives a continuous expression of Christian love, nourished by the desire to identify themselves radically with Christ and to serve the Church faithfully.

Many families in your homeland live the Christian ideal with self-denial amidst great difficulty that threaten the solidarity of conjugal love, responsible fatherhood and the harmony and stability of the domestic heart. The efforts made will never be enough to develop a lively pastoral care of the family that invites people to discover the beauty of the vocation to Christian marriage, to defend human life from its conception to its natural end and to build families in which children are raised in love for the truth of the Gospel and solid human values. In your country, as in other places, people are going through difficult times that give rise to hardship as well as situations that promise great

hope. In the present situation, it is especially urgent that the Church in Panama does not cease to offer the illumination that contributes to the solution of the pressing human problems that exist, promoting a moral consensus of society based on the fundamental values.

For this it is essential to popularize the *Compendium of Social Doctrine of the Church* which facilitates a deeper and more systematic knowledge of the ecclesial orientations, which the lay faithful in particular must take on in political, social and economic spheres, encouraging likewise its correct application in the actual circumstances. Christian hope will thus illumine the people of Panama who are thirsting to know the truth about God and about man in the midst of phenomena such as poverty, violence among young people, insufficient education, health care and housing, besieged by innumerable sects and corruption, which in different degrees disturb their life and prevent their integral development. At the end of this meeting, I entrust you and all the sons and daughters of this noble nation to the intercession of Santa María la Antigua, so that her motherly love may always shine upon Panama and comfort you on your journey. With these sentiments, I impart my Apostolic Blessing to you with affection.

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