



The Holy See

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

Thursday, 17 December 2009

*Your Eminence,
Venerable Brothers,*

I am pleased to offer each one of you my cordial welcome to the house of the Successor of Peter, to whom Christ has entrusted the task of tending his sheep (cf. Jn 21: 15-19), strengthening his brethren in the faith (cf. Lk 22: 31) and preserving and promoting ecclesial unity (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 22). I thank Bishop Aleksander Kaskiewicz for his words presenting the path that the Church in Belarus is taking and highlighting the challenges ahead.

At the meetings I have had with you I appreciated the pastoral zeal with which you carry out your ministry, desiring and constantly working to increase co-responsibility, communion and the sharing of decisions with one another so that your service may be ever more fruitful. Indeed, it is particularly important to proclaim the perennial Message of the Gospel with renewed enthusiasm and efficacy in a society that is not immune to the temptations of secularism, hedonism and relativism: the problems of a falling birth rate, the frailty of families and the illusion that good fortune is to be found outside the homeland are a sign of it. In the face of these challenges, an urgent task of Pastors is to emphasize the power of faith, a faith rooted in a solid tradition, to contribute to preserving the profound Christian identity of the nation in respectful dialogue with other cultures and religions. To achieve this objective, accepting the invitation in the Psalm: "Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!" (Ps 133[132]: 1), it is necessary to take great pains in formulating and promoting ever more appropriate pastoral programmes and methods, as well as in putting into practice the decisions of the Bishops' Conference. This renewed testimony of unity, in addition to favouring the proclamation of the

Gospel, will also facilitate relations with the civil Authorities and, especially, ecumenical relations.

Another element of pastoral action that I wish to underscore is special attention to the educational dimension. As I have said several times, today we are living in a sort of "emergency" in this delicate and essential sector and must redouble the efforts to offer a sound formation to the new generations, in the first place. I therefore encourage you to persevere in your commitment, ensuring that the journey of faith in all the stages of life is marked by an adequate catechesis and that there are *intra* and *extra* ecclesial opportunities to ensure that, under your guidance, Christ's Message reaches every part of the flock entrusted to you. Concern for the discernment and guidance of the different vocations acquires special importance particularly vocations to the priesthood and to the religious life as does the commitment to encouraging programmes for the human and Christian development of youth. In this regard, I ask you to be watchful to ensure that candidates to the priesthood receive a sound and rigorous spiritual and theological formation and are duly guided in undertaking a serious and profound verification of the divine call. The situation of our society today demands particularly careful discernment. Thus it is important for the future of your Church that you continue to offer young seminarians in Grodno and Pinsk a complete and qualified course of formation. Furthermore, the fact that in both these institutions candidates for the diocesan clergy and for the religious life share the same formation for the priesthood affords a good opportunity to promote a uniform pastoral action. This situation will bear ever more promising fruits if the educational curriculum continues to be the result of intense collaboration between the Bishop and the respective religious Superiors. It will also be able to give life to projects for continuing formation. Be close and ever more caring to your priests, especially those who are beginning their pastoral ministry. The attentive and cordial exercise of the Bishop's fatherly role is a fundamental element for the success of priestly life! It is necessary in addition to be constantly aware that the Lord is calling you, as Pastors of the Church, to discern every ministry destined to the edification of the ecclesial body, even one that is secular, cultural and civil, for all contribute to extending the Kingdom of God in Belarus, in the spirit of true and real communion so as to evoke those Christian values that made a crucial contribution to the building of the European civilization.

Dear Brothers, may you recognize every appropriate opportunity to proclaim and spread the Kingdom of God, witnessing with practical actions to brotherhood that generates peace, to the meekness that accompanies justice, to the spirit of communion that shuns personalism, to love that is patient and kind, not jealous or boastful, not arrogant or disrespectful, that does not seek its own interests, is not irritable or resentful, does not harbour resentment but rejoices in the truth, bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things, for love of Christ (cf. 1 Cor 13: 4-7). Fraternal collaboration with the Orthodox Church of Belarus also fits into this context. Her Pastors share with you the search for and commitment to the good of the faithful. The Orthodox Churches too, like the Catholic Church, are deeply committed to reflecting on how to respond to the challenges of our time in order to transmit Christ's Message faithfully. Accepting the invitation issued at the recent Catholic-Orthodox Meeting in Cyprus, we must intensify our common journey in this direction. The small but fervent Greek Catholic community that exists in your country will be

able to make a significant contribution. It is an important testimony for the Church and a gift of the Lord.

A few months ago I received the President of the Republic of Belarus. At our cordial and respectful meeting, the desire of both parties to stipulate an Agreement that is currently being drafted, was reaffirmed. In addition, I stressed the special attention with which this Apostolic See, and likewise the Bishops' Conference, follows the events in the country and the commitment to effective collaboration on matters of common interest in order to promote the citizens' good with mutual respect for the competences of each one.

Venerable Brothers, as I renew my gratitude, I invoke the Mother of God, so beloved in your land, so that she may sustain, guide and protect you. With these wishes and with special affection, I impart to you, to the priests, to the men and women religious and to all the faithful a special Apostolic Blessing, as I assure you of my remembrance in prayer for the whole Belarusian People.

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