



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO MEMBERS OF THE BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF VENEZUELA
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Consistory Hall

Monday, 8 June 2009

Your Eminence,

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

I warmly welcome you Pastors of the Church of Venezuela to this meeting during your *ad limina* visit. As Successor of Peter, I thank the Lord for this opportunity to strengthen my brothers in the faith (cf. Lk 22: 32) and to share in their joys and worries, in their projects and their difficulties.

First of all I thank Archbishop Ubaldo Ramón Santana Sequera of Maracaibo, President of the Venezuelan Bishops' Conference, for his words expressing your communion with the Bishop of Rome and the Head of the Episcopal College, as well as the challenges and hopes of your pastoral ministry.

In fact the challenges you must face in your pastoral work are ever more numerous and difficult, aggravated moreover as they have been recently by the serious global economic crisis. Yet, the present time also offers many true reasons to hope, that hope which can fill the hearts of all human beings "can only be God God who has loved us and who continues to love us "to the end"" (*Spe Salvi*, n. 27). As he did with the disciples of Emmaus (cf. Lk 24: 13-35), the Risen Lord also walks beside us, imbuing us with his spirit of love and fortitude so that we may open our hearts to a future of hope and of eternal life.

You have before you, dear Brothers, an exciting task of evangelization and you have begun the "Mission for Venezuela" in line with the Continental Mission promoted by the Fifth General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops' Conferences at Aparecida. These are also times of grace for those who are dedicated to the Gospel cause without reserve. Trust in the

Lord. He will make your self-giving and sacrifices fruitful.

I encourage you, therefore, to increase your initiatives to make Jesus Christ and his message known in their fullness and beauty. For this, in addition to the sound doctrinal formation of the entire People of God, it is important to encourage a profound life of faith and prayer. In the liturgy, in the intimate dialogue of personal or community prayer, the Risen Christ comes to meet us, transforming our hearts with his loving presence.

I would also like to remind you of the need of a spiritual life for Bishops. Configured fully to Christ the Head by the sacrament of Orders they are in a certain way a visible sign of the Lord Jesus (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 21). For this reason the pastoral ministry must be a consistent reflection of Jesus, Servant of God, showing to everyone the capital importance of faith and likewise the need to give priority to the vocation to holiness (cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Gregis*, n. 12).

Fruitful pastoral action requires close affective and effective communion among the Pastors of the People of God who "should appreciate that they are closely united to each other and should be solicitous for all the Churches" (*Christus Dominus*, n. 6). This unity, which today and always must be promoted and expressed in a visible manner, will be a source of comfort and apostolic effectiveness in the ministry entrusted to you.

The spirit of communion involves paying special attention to your priests. As the closest collaborators of the episcopal ministry, they must be the first recipients of your pastoral care and should be treated with closeness and brotherly friendship. This will help them to carry out with self-denial the ministry they have received and, when necessary, to accept advice in a filial spirit on some aspects they may need to improve or correct. I therefore encourage you to redouble your efforts to give an impetus to the pastoral zeal of your priests, especially during this coming Year for Priests which I have chosen to declare.

In addition to this is the interest that must be shown to the Diocesan Seminary, in order to encourage a thorough and competent selection of those called to be pastors of the People of God, without economizing on the human or material means this may require.

The lay faithful, for their part, participate in their own specific way in the Church's saving mission (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 33). As disciples and missionaries of Christ they are called to illumine and to order temporal realities in such a way that they respond to God's loving plan (*ibid.*, n. 31). This requires a mature laity that bear a faithful witness to their faith and feel the joy of belonging to the Body of Christ. Among other things lay people must be offered an adequate knowledge of the Church's social doctrine. In this regard I appreciate your work to make the light of the Gospel shine on the most important events that affect your country, with no other interest than to disseminate the most genuine Christian values, with a view to encouraging the search for the common good,

harmonious coexistence and social stability.

I entrust the needy to you in particular. Continue to encourage the many charitable projects of the Church in Venezuela so that your neediest brothers and sisters may feel the presence among them of the One who on the Cross gave his life for every human being.

I end with a word of hope and encouragement to you in your task; you may always count on my support, concern and spiritual closeness. Please convey my affectionate greeting to all the members of your particular Churches; to the Bishops emeritus, the priests, the religious and the lay faithful, especially married couples, young people, the elderly and those who are suffering. With these sentiments and as I invoke the protection of the Virgin Mary, Our Lady of Coromoto, so deeply loved throughout Venezuela, I cordially impart to you the Apostolic Blessing.

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