



The Holy See

LETTER OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II TO THE BISHOPS OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

*To my dear Brothers the Bishops
of the United States*

Following the recent meeting in the Vatican of the Metropolitan Archbishops of the United States with myself and members of the Roman Curia, and as the solemn Feast of Easter draws near, I am happy to send you my warmest fraternal greetings in the love of our Risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The Church's annual celebration of the central mysteries of our faith—the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus—is an appropriate time for us, the Successors of the Apostles, to renew in mind, heart and action our commitment to one of the foremost tasks springing from our episcopal ordination: to be witnesses and teachers of the word of truth, the gospel of our salvation^[1]. The Resurrection, in fact, is the preeminent sign of the power of the Gospel to save men and women in every age and in every place and culture. Indeed, the Paschal Mystery is the deepest source of our trust in our own ministry as Bishops.

The encounter with the United States Metropolitans provided an occasion for a most fruitful reflection and discussion on important aspects of the Church's evangelizing role in your country, which will offer valuable points of reference for your future ministry. It was also an intense experience of the abiding presence in our midst of the Holy Spirit, the Divine Counsellor who guides us into all truth^[2]. The Eucharist which we concelebrated at the tomb of the Prince of the Apostles symbolized in a powerful way the communion which unites us in Christ and in the Church. There we gave thanks for the Church in the United States, for you the Bishops, as well as for the priests, deacons, religious and laity. We implored God's blessing upon your particular Churches and on all those in need.

Rather than a list of specific conclusions, you who were present will convey to those whom you represented an increased awareness of the challenges which call the Church in the United States to proclaim ever more effectively the mystery of Christ. While yours is a culture with many positive

values, it is at the same time, like everything human, marked by elements which need to be purified and uplifted by the saving message of the Gospel[3]. In this perspective our task as Pastors is to speak always the truth of Jesus Christ entrusted to the Church —that truth which gives life and which alone can set us free.

In our discussions, those ordained to the ministerial priesthood occupied a very significant place because of their unique role in building up and sustaining each local Church and because of the love, understanding and gratitude that all the Bishops manifested in their regard. Bishops have a special ministry to priests, to encourage and support them. Justice and charity require that wise and careful attention be given to all aspects of their formation, life and ministry. In this, as in every important ecclesial matter, it is imperative to study and implement the documents of the Second Vatican Council in all their richness and inspiration. I will pray for the priests of the United States in a special way at this week's Chrism Mass as together we recommit ourselves to the demands of our common sacramental configuration with Christ.

My own part in the meeting corresponded to the requirements of the Petrine ministry of which I spoke during our gathering in Los Angeles in 1987, as not only a "global" service, reaching each particular Church from "outside" as it were, but as belonging already to the essence of each particular Church from "within"[4]. It is of the greatest importance that in the full power of the Church's communion we continue to proclaim together Jesus Christ and his Gospel. In this way we ourselves live fully, as Successors of the Apostles, the mystery of ecclesial communion. At the same time through our ministry we enable the faithful to enter ever more deeply into the Church's life of communion with the Most Holy Trinity[5].

As we celebrate the glory of the Risen Lord, I pray for each of you and for the whole Church in the United States. I give thanks to God for the profound *collegialitas effectiva et affectiva* that unites us in the mystery of Christ and his Church and was clearly manifested in our recent meeting. I commend to the intercession of the Mother of God, Mary Immaculate, the continuing and urgent tasks and challenges of your teaching, sanctifying and governing ministry. As a token of fraternal love and esteem, I gladly impart my Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, March 19, 1989.

IOANNES PAULUS PP. II

[1] Cf. *Eph* 1:13.

[2] Cf. *Jn* 16:13.

[3] Cf. *Evangelii nuntiandi*, 20.

[4] Cf. *Address to United States Bishops, September 16, 1987*, No. 4.

[5] Cf. *ibid.*

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