



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO A GROUP OF BISHOPS FROM AUSTRALIA
ON THEIR «AD LIMINA APOSTOLORUM» VISIT**

Saturday, 2 July 1983

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

1. In this hour of collegial unity, I welcome you with deep affection in our Lord Jesus Christ. In you I greet the whole ecclesial community in Australia and express my admiration for what God has accomplished in your land over the past decades. I express the gratitude of the universal Church for the profound attachment of your people to the Catholic Faith, to the Church, and, in particular, to the Eucharist. I evoke with reverence and praise the many charitable activities performed in the name of Jesus Christ by a vital part of his Church. I thank you and your people and all who have gone before you for everything you have done to consolidate the Church of God in your midst. Two mighty instruments of the apostolate and of God's grace have been *the parish* and *the Catholic school* in Australia. Please God these providential institutions will remain strong and effective for generations to come. In these and in many other ways, the Bishops have worked tirelessly, together with the priests, Religious and laity, to spread the Kingdom of God and to proclaim the Lordship of Jesus Christ. In so many different situations the Bishops of Australia have shown themselves to be true pastors of their people. Among such situations one may mention the great efforts being made to help the many families suffering from the present grave problem of unemployment. These efforts I praise and encourage. At the same time, we have to remember that it is not material help alone that is needed: it is spiritual solidarity with the deprived that counts for far more. In this respect I would also add a word of praise for what is being done to meet the needs and special problems of the descendants of the first inhabitants of your vast Continent. May the special programmes already in hand be quickly brought to fruition.

2. There is one special aspect of your pastoral mission that I would like to reflect on with you today. It is *the preaching of the Gospel*, which according to the Second Vatican Council occupies a

pre-eminent place among the principal duties of Bishops (Cfr. *Lumen Gentium*, 25). This role is principal and pre-eminent precisely because Jesus said to his Apostles: “Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations . . . and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you” (*Matth.* 28, 20). As Bishops we are called upon *to proclaim Christ*: to preach Jesus Christ as Lord; to proclaim him as the fullness of Revelation; to proclaim his word as light and strength for our people; to proclaim the need to accept Jesus Christ - the need for every individual to give the personal response of faith to the Father who reveals himself in his Incarnate Word.

Today we commemorate together the *command* of Jesus to the Apostles: to preach the Gospel. At the same time we recall his unfailing *promise* (*Ibid.*). We are in effect emphasizing the profound meaning of our Episcopal ministry - what we are called to do, who we are meant to be. We are celebrating our identity as Bishops of the Church of God, united in a collegial act of confidence, joy and fresh resolve. We cannot emphasize too strongly the *pastoral responsibility of Bishops* to be heralds of the Gospel, authentic teachers of the faith and “stewards of the mysteries of God” (*1 Cor.* 4, 1).

On my part I am grateful to you for everything you have done and will continue to do in this regard. In particular I would mention your efforts to bring to your people the teachings of *Familiaris Consortio*, which is in effect the application of the word of God as it touches the Christian family. In the past you have made concerted efforts to proclaim the dignity of life and to expose the evil of abortion: other ethical problems which call for your constant vigilance are current trends in genetical experimentation, and also the question of the care of the old and respect for their life. You must never cease to point out that any legislation that permits abuses in these matters is not a solution to the problems of society and is an affront to the dignity of the human person.

Through your Committee for Education, you have addressed the vital issues of handing on the faith. For these and for so many Other efforts on behalf of the Gospel, I thank you, Venerable Brothers, with all my heart.

3. In reflecting on our ministry at the service of God’s word, we are struck by the awesome responsibility that has been given to us: *to see to it that the faith is rightly transmitted* to our people. Hence our main endeavour is to proclaim the word of God, which is at the basis of all faith. In the words of Saint Paul: “Faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ” (*Rom.* 10, 17). The Lord Jesus, who commissioned us to teach and preach, calls us to present his word in all its fullness, and to emphasize its power to save humanity. The Gospel is indeed “the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith” (*Ibid.* 1, 16). And because the Gospel contains the saving power of God, we must present the Gospel in all its implications and with all its demands. We must transmit it to future generations in all its purity.

In this context we see the capital importance of the Church’s mission and of *our own Episcopal mission to evangelize*. There is no doubt about it: the Church finds her identity in evangelizing -

and so do we Bishops find ours. Each of us is called to be a living sign of the Jesus who says: “I must proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of God . . . because this is what I was sent to do” (*Luc. 4, 43*).

4. In the whole process of evangelization there is that very remarkable aspect or “moment” of *catechesis*. The aim of catechesis is to mature the initial faith of believers and to bring them to a deeper and more systematic knowledge of the person and the message of our Lord Jesus Christ (Cfr. IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Catechesi Tradendae*, 19-20). Such an aim deserves the full attention of all Bishops as pastors and teachers of God’s people, as “the catechists par excellence” (*Ibid.* 63). It is supremely significant that my Predecessor John XXIII, addressing the Bishops of the world on the opening day of the Second Vatican Council, clearly and succinctly spelled out the Council’s purpose, saying: “The greatest concern of the Ecumenical Council is this: that the sacred deposit of Christian doctrine should be more effectively guarded and taught” (IOANNIS XXIII *Allocutio ad Episcopos totius orbis terrarum occasione oblata apritionis Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II*, die 11 oct. 1962). This was *the greatest concern of the Council*, and it should be our greatest concern as Bishops in the post-conciliar Church: “That the sacred deposit of Christian doctrine should be more effectively guarded and taught”.

This concern of ours expresses itself both in zealous support of improved catechetical methods and in constant vigilance to maintain the full content of revealed faith as proclaimed by the Church.

The *content of catechesis* is the content of evangelization and it necessitates a full Christian initiation, which is linked with the whole liturgical and sacramental activity of the Church. In communicating through catechesis the living mystery of God, the Church calls for an ever greater commitment to Christian living “in spirit and truth” (*Io. 4, 23*). The Creeds of the Church, and in particular the Creed of the People of God, are sure points of reference for the content of catechesis. The perennial relevance of the Ten Commandments and the implications of the Our Father are for ever linked to an effective catechesis of the Christian people; they are indeed at the core of catechesis. The characteristics of genuine catechisms are those mentioned in *Catechesi Tradendae*: fidelity to the essential content of Revelation and up-to-date methodology which will be capable of educating the Christian generations of the future to a sturdy faith (Cfr. IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Catechesi Tradendae*, 50).

5. It is precisely as teachers of the faith, as pastors who personally proclaim the Gospel in word and sacrament, that Bishops cooperate with the Holy Spirit in forming and evangelizing and catechizing people, endowed with the enthusiasm and dynamism of the Catholic laity. Much remains to be said about the laity and their shared responsibility for the proclamation of the Gospel. But it is very important to stress the fact that the proper actuation of the laity’s charism in this field is intimately linked to the Bishops’ personal, principal and pre-eminent role of preaching the Gospel. The *effectiveness of all the different teaching roles* within the ecclesial community *depends on the effective exercise of the Bishops’ charism* in union with the Successor of Peter.

Through the Bishops' charism, the priests are strengthened in faith and confirmed in their own ministry of the word, as are the theologians in theirs. Through the Bishops, the genuine Catholic Faith is transmitted to parents, to be passed on to their children. *Teachers and educators* at all levels can receive *the guarantee of their own faith only through the Bishops*. All the laity bear witness to that purity of faith which the Bishops work strenuously to maintain.

In the pure and undiluted faith preached by the Bishops is found the full power of God's word. This power of God's word in the answer we give to all the forces of secularization and de-Christianization in the world. The power of God's word is the contribution we make to the young people of today's world: it gives them their greatest reason for hope. The power of God's word is what we offer as an act of pastoral love to our people. *To communicate* the power of God's word is the very reason we are Bishops; it is why we were sent.

Venerable and dear Brothers, I am close to you in this exacting but exhilarating mission that is yours. In expressing my own pastoral love for all those whom you serve and for all those who collaborate with you, I would like to quote what you yourselves commissioned to be written a few years ago in the document entitled "We Preach Jesus Christ as Lord": "Our message is not an easy one, but it is a magnificent charge. The message we have been sent to proclaim is not human wisdom but the wisdom of God (Cfr. *1 Cor.* 1, 24). No new knowledge acquired by men can transcend this wisdom or make it useless or unnecessary. No new culture or civilization can render it irrelevant or outmoded . . . Moreover, we must have every confidence that the Living Christ and his Spirit can enable the Church to present the Gospel to men of today as the living truth" ("We Preach Jesus Christ as Lord", p. 6).

Dear Brothers: Praised be Jesus Christ, the living truth!

© Copyright 1983 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana