



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS OF HONDURAS
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Tuesday, 4 December 2001

Dear Brother Bishops,

1. I am delighted to receive you today, during your *ad limina* visit. It has given you the opportunity once again to come in pilgrimage to the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul, and to renew your bonds of communion with the Bishop of Rome and with the universal Church. It also helps you to live your mission of guiding the ecclesial community of Honduras, whom I had the joy of visiting in 1983.

I cordially thank Cardinal Oscar Andrés Rodríguez Maradiaga, Archbishop of Tegucigalpa and President of the Episcopal Conference, for the kind words he addressed to me in the name of his Brother Bishops. I greet him saying with the Apostle Paul: "grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom 1,7). Likewise, I ask you to communicate my affectionate greetings to the members of every ecclesial community of your beloved country.

I feel very much united to you in sharing "the joys and the hopes, the sorrows and the anguish" (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 1) of the Honduran citizens. I keep before me still the grief and the worry in the face of the devastation caused by the hurricane "Mitch" in October 1998 and more recently by the tropical storm "Michelle". Faced with such catastrophes you have sought to relieve the sufferings of your people, already so tried by poverty, and stir up new hopes in them. I hope that the new recently elected political leaders can continue the work of true national reconstruction that brings real development for the Country, with due respect for the dignity of the human person and his fundamental rights.

2. The upcoming commemoration of 500 years of the First Mass celebrated on the continent is

another source of hope and joy for the Church in Honduras. This anniversary should be lived as a providential occasion to begin a new journey full of initiatives, always remembering the words of the Lord: "I am with you always" (Mt 28,20). In the flyer you have published for this event you say that "with grateful memories and the impressions still fresh of the great events of spirituality of the Great Jubilee of 2000, the pilgrim Church in Honduras gives thanks to God and with great joy invites the Universal Church to join in her praise to God the Father, who saves through faith in his Son Jesus Christ, made the Lord of History by the Holy Spirit. We are inspired and moved recalling that our territory was chosen by the Providential God so that on 14 August 1502 the humble brother Alejandro celebrated here the First Mass in a place elevated and forested that today we call Baia di Trujillo" (*Fifth Centenary of the First Mass on the American continent*, Tegucigalpa, 3-1-2001). It is a good occasion to analyze the history of the evangelization of this land, that is part of the history of your Nation. It will contribute to making understood the providential acton of the Lord and to looking with hope to the future, strengthening the faith and giving a new impulse to ecclesial life in all its aspects.

3. As Pastors you are very concerned about the situation of persistent poverty in Honduras, even though it has a fertile territory where material resources are not lacking. This makes us think of the need to improve the social order, by promoting greater justice and structures that favour a more equitable distribution of goods. It is primarily necessary to avoid having a few citizens with so many resources to the detriment of the great majority. When this kind of phenomenon appears, to economic hardship there is added the isolation of the poorest who, locked in their own world, lose hope in a better society. As a result, the country suffers when peasants feel marginalized, when Indian ethnic groups and citizens most in need of protection, such as children and youths, are forgotten and abandoned to their fate.

It is urgent to promote real justice, because "to ignore this demand could encourage the temptation among the victims of injustice to respond with violence", that is "the peoples excluded from the fair distribution of the goods originally destined for all" (*Sollicitudo rei socialis*, n. 10). It is necessary to promote the diffusion of the rich patrimony of the Social Doctrine of the Church, with which Catholics can inspire and favour initiatives aimed at overcoming situations of poverty and marginalization that afflict many people. It must not be forgotten that concern for the social dimension is part of the Church's evangelizing mission (cf. *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, n. 41) and that "human promotion is part of evangelization, because the latter tends towards the integral liberation of the person" (*inaugural address of the Fourth General Conference of the Latin-american Bishops*, 12-10-1992, n. 13).

Once again I invite you, dear Brothers, to insist on the preferential option for the poor, neither exclusive nor excluding, also programming pastoral activities in villages and rural zones. Poor and marginalized people have a right to feel the special closeness of their Pastors, remembering what the psalmist says: "Blessed is he who considers the poor" (Ps 40, 2).

4. The break-up of the family, which can also be seen in Honduras, is an equally troubling phenomenon in our day. As you highlight in your five-year report, there are many families who do not live according to Christian norms. Apart from the circumstances that lead to these problematic situations, we cannot remain inactive before them. In the Encyclical *Evangelium vitae* I wrote: "Although it is true that 'the future of humanity passes by way of the family', it must be admitted that modern social, economic and cultural conditions make the family's task of serving life more difficult and demanding. In order to fulfil its vocation as the 'sanctuary of life', as the cell of a society which loves and welcomes life, *the family urgently needs to be helped and supported...* For her part, the Church must untiringly promote a plan of pastoral care for families, capable of making every family rediscover and live with joy and courage its mission to further the *Gospel of life*" (n. 94).

Moreover, when the domestic hearth is destroyed, other dramatic situations result like single or abandoned mothers, who must struggle to support and educate children, and the problem of street children. The Church and society cannot remain indifferent before these facts.

It is necessary to sensitize all the available areas, including mass media, in order to strengthen marriage and the family and respond to certain campaigns or fashions that threaten the family institution and life itself in a concealed way.

5. Looking towards the future of humanity, offering an adequate education to children and young people is of capital importance. Honduran society must keep in mind that education, a fundamental right of every person, is at the foundation of the growth of individuals and of society. A common effort is needed because the field of education regards everyone. The contribution of the Church in Honduras cannot limit itself to a few colleges. The witness of professors and Christian teachers, in addition to Catholic schools must be added to ensure an adequate formation for future generations.

6. The spirituality of communion that "embodies and reveals the very essence of the mystery of the Church" (*Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 42) and is a "great challenge facing us in the millennium which is now beginning" (*ibid.* n. 43), should be carefully applied to the particular Churches. It is the responsibility of their Pastors to foster harmony among all, and in particular, the unity of priests with one another and around their Bishop. For this I invite you to give your attention to those who are your principal collaborators, not limiting your efforts nor being satisfied with the management and organization of the clergy. Closeness is necessary, constant personal contact, cordiality and encouragement in the mission entrusted to each one, following the example of the Good Shepherd who calls his sheep "one by one" (Jn 10,3). In Honduras, where priests often have to look after a lot of the faithful, at times spread out in remote regions, and where a lot of them have left their native land to serve the Honduran ecclesial communities, the Bishops must be ready to welcome them, considering them as "sons and friends" (*Christus Dominus*, n. 16).

These considerations highlight the validity of the norm that prescribes the personal residence of the diocesan Bishop in his see (cf. *CIC.*, c. 395) as well as the urgency of its strict fulfillment.

7. The spirit of communion must also bear abundant fruit in every particular Church in the consecrated life. The various Institutes and Societies have their own charism and must faithfully keep their foundational spirit, remembering that it is "not restricted to any one Institute, but benefits the whole Church" (*Vita consecrata*, n. 49). In your country, where consecrated persons have an important role as evangelizers, this kind of life must be "more highly esteemed and promoted by Bishops, priests, and Christian communities" (*Ecclesia in America*, n. 43), being fully integrated into the particular Church to which they belong (cf. *ibid.*). Therefore the Pastors, in coordinating their efforts and initiatives, must propose not only a greater effectiveness in pastoral action, but also a more harmonious growth of the ecclesial community, where there are different charisms and ministries, but only one Lord who "produces all of them in everyone" (I Cor 12,6).

8. Though there is a slight increase in the number of seminarians in Honduras, it remains urgent to generously foster vocations to the priesthood and to a life of special consecration. In addition to praying with insistence that the Lord "send laborers into his harvest" (Mt 9, 38) and living in such a way that the exemplary life of priests and consecrated persons attracts the new generations, it is necessary to intensify an effective plan of vocational promotion (cf. *Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 46).

With this plan there is the exciting task of provoking profound unrest in the hearts of youth and preparing them to welcome the invitation of the Lord with generosity: "Come, follow me" (Mt 19, 21). This proposal must be made explicitly and directly, but don't forget that the first response to vocation is only the beginning of the journey. An accurate discernment of vocations and a serious spiritual, human, theological and cultural formation are decisive for candidates to the priesthood and consecrated life. The scarcity of vocations cannot be the cause of negligence in examining their fittingness. In the present social and cultural situation the requirements should be stricter than in the past.

9. The participation of laity in Honduran ecclesial life merits special attention. I am thinking of the many agents of pastoral care and the Delegates of the Word of God, chosen and charged with holding appropriate Sunday celebrations, in places where a priest cannot be present to celebrate the Eucharist. Nor can we forget the many ecclesial Movements who enrich the Church with their charisms. Without doubt the services offered to the Church by lay faithful are very valid. However, we must avoid the error of thinking that they can substitute ordained ministers where these are lacking. These lay agents of pastoral care need a solid theological preparation in the spirituality of communion, highlighting the difference between the ecclesial service of the lay faithful and the ministries which are proper and exclusive to Holy Orders (cf. *Lumen gentium*, n. 10; *Christifideles laici*, n. 22).

Laity should be invited to collaborate in an active, responsible way in the catechesis for the first

Communion and for Confirmation, in addition to the preparation of couples for the Sacrament of Marriage. It is essential that the parishes offer a systematic education in the Catholic faith that is not limited to superficial preparation to receive the Sacraments of Christian Initiation. Every one of the faithful has the right to receive a deep formation in the Catholic faith from the Church, suited to his age and condition, to grow in the faith. Moreover neglect in this field can be one of the reasons why many of the faithful leave the Church and join sects.

10. Dear Brothers, as I already proposed in the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio ineunte*, we are setting out anew from Christ, always contemplating his face, making ourselves witnesses of his love to put out into the deep. In our hope-filled journey, let us seek to stay ever closer to Him, to be invited anew to proclaim his saving message to all our brothers and sisters.

I implore the constant protection of the Virgin of Suyapa on all of you. May She accompany you in these new pastoral challenges. I also entrust to her your priests and the consecrated men and women with all the sons and daughters of Honduras, and I impart to you a heartfelt Apostolic Blessing.