



The Holy See

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

Friday, 23 November 2001

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

1. I am happy to receive you this morning during your *ad limina* visit which allows you to renew the bonds of communion of your particular Churches with the Bishop of Rome. I greet you all with great affection, and ask you to express my esteem and closeness to the beloved Salvadoran people whom you serve with love, generosity and dedication, mindful of the Apostle Paul's witness in his service to the community of Corinth: "I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls" (II Cor 12,15).

I am grateful for the sentiments Archbishop Fernando Sáenz of San Salvador, President of the Bishops' Conference, expressed to renew your support. His words show the spirit in which you carry out your pastoral ministry. For my part, I respond by expressing my appreciation of the work you are achieving in your dioceses, with the help of God and the collaboration of so many servants of the Gospel.

2. In the reports you gave me and at the meetings I have had with each one of you, I saw the reconstruction which the Church has launched in your nation. At the end of my second Pastoral Visit, I told you as I departed: "I leave with great confidence in the future of this beloved land: live in the light of faith, with the strength of hope and the generosity of fraternal love" (*Farewell Address at San Salvador Airport*, 8 February 1996, n. 5). I had in mind the aspirations and hopes of this beloved people that I was able to get to know and appreciate more deeply. It is a people who suffered the difficult years of a fratricidal war from which, fortunately it had emerged and was beginning to undertake its own development with determination in order to build a serene future of solidarity for its children.

Continue to guide your faithful as ministers of reconciliation, so that the flock entrusted to you can advance on paths of concord and sincere love without exception! You know well that the country's future must be built on peace, for justice to flourish (cf. Jas 3,18). If you take this path, all the effort put into the signing of the Peace Agreements in 1992 which ended the terrible years of civil war, will have proved beneficial. Help to build a society that fosters harmony and respect for the person and his fundamental rights. Keeping in mind the common good, you must encourage everyone, starting with those who have political, administrative and juridical responsibility, to promote a higher standard of living, work and housing.

The Salvadoreans' capacity for hard work, their moral strength and spirit of sacrifice in the face of adversity are well known. They showed these qualities on the occasion of Hurricane Mitch and the two earthquakes, one month apart, which struck them at the beginning of this year. On those occasions, I immediately expressed my closeness, appealing for solidarity and help for the victims of those appalling natural disasters that rendered the very existence of many Salvadoreans precarious, and damaged so many buildings.

Although external aid is certainly necessary, given the magnitude of the phenomenon, it should be recalled that the Salvadoreans, with the rich qualities that distinguish them, must themselves play the lead and be the principal architects of the country's reconstruction. Through their own work and commitment, they must overcome this situation that is so difficult and aggravated by the extreme poverty of many, unemployment and the lack of decent housing. It is only right to highlight *Caritas'* work which seeks to answer these needs.

4. As your main pastoral goal, you propose to foster evangelization. Indeed, one of the Bishop's most important tasks is to confirm the faith of his faithful, by helping the teachings of the Gospel mature in them by expounding the mystery of Christ fully, so that they may give glory to God and follow the path to eternal happiness (cf. *Christus Dominus*, n. 12).

In our day, when the modern media constantly bombard us with detailed reports of the latest news, it is necessary to give priority to the Word of God and its proclamation. When the believer welcomes Jesus Christ and his word and puts it into practice, it is then that truth attains its fullness, as Peter confesses before Jesus: "*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life*" (Jn 6,68). Thus it is crucially important that the ministries of preaching, catechesis and teaching continue to flourish, so that all the faithful may "*have life and have it abundantly*" (Jn 10,10).

The preaching of the Word acquires special prominence when it is proclaimed during the liturgy, for Christ "*is present in his word since it is he himself who speaks when the Holy Scriptures are read in the church*" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 7). However, since the Church's action is not exhausted in the liturgy, you must persevere in proclaiming the Word and use every means to ensure that the message of salvation reaches believers and non-believers. The media today must

also be used for evangelization and catechesis, so as to make the most of their enormous potential, the better to fulfil Jesus' mandate to preach the Good News to the whole creation (cf. Mk 16,15). I urge you to implement the means at your disposal and to put them at the service of the spread of the Gospel. Through them the message of salvation can reach everyone.

5. Priests are the Bishop's immediate collaborators. In his name they preside over the communities of the particular Church, nourish them with the Bread of the Word and of the Eucharist, celebrate the sacraments and through their closeness to everyone, must be the image of the living presence of Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, in the midst of his People. To live joyfully the mystery that has been entrusted to them through priestly ordination, they must zealously safeguard the grace they have been granted. To this end, you must always encourage your priests to be men of diligent and frequent prayer, since "prayer develops that conversation with Christ which makes us his intimate friends" (*Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 32), lets us penetrate the profound mystery of God and fill life with hope in the face of the challenges of the present time, which for priests are often particularly difficult.

Priests must be available to all. They must know how to listen, how to guide the growth in the faith of their brothers and sisters and how to be a source of comfort for the troubled or afflicted, since at every instant they witness to the values of the Kingdom. In brief, they must be and present themselves as ministers of Jesus Christ and of his grace.

The close bond that unites the priest with his Bishop requires that you always be close and attentive to each one of them, so that he may look to you as a true father and teacher. Relying on the charism of your episcopal ministry, encourage each of them to persevere on the path of genuine priestly holiness and pastoral charity. Give them the best means so that they can continue their formation, develop those virtues necessary for their state and face courageously the problems they may meet.

6. I know that in your concern for the number of people dedicated to the mission, you are doing much to encourage the pastoral care of vocations, to develop the Church's life. The first step is recourse to prayer, since the Lord himself commands us to ask him to send out labourers into his harvest (cf. Mt 9,38). You must organize an effective, broad and far-reaching vocations ministry, in parishes, movements, schools and families, so that young people may know the values and demands of the Kingdom of God and respond when asked to make the complete gift of themselves for the sake of the Gospel.

7. The celebration of the Eucharist reinforces communion and hope; it is a source of harmony and peace and ensures that everyone feels he or she belongs to the same family where the dignity of each one is recognized. You must encourage Sunday Mass attendance, since in the process of strengthening the faith, the Eucharist is the privileged moment for meeting the living Jesus Christ. Since Sunday Mass must be a constant duty of the faithful, dedicate yourselves together with your

priests, to promoting this important aspect of ecclesial life. Recently, I pointed out that it was necessary "to stress particularly the Sunday Eucharist and Sunday itself experienced as a special day of faith, the day of the Risen Lord and of the gift of the Spirit, the true weekly Easter" (*Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 35).

In the life of the Church in your nation, Eucharistic devotion is widespread. You mention how adoration of the Blessed Sacrament takes place in almost all the parishes, especially on Thursdays. I rejoice that this practice has been kept alive among the faithful, since it proclaims faith in Christ's real presence in the Eucharist, and it also encourages union with and trust in the One who promised to stay with his disciples "*always, to the close of the age*" (Mt 28,20).

8. One of the urgent needs of our time, as I stressed in my Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio ineunte*, is attention to families since they are experiencing "a radical and widespread crisis" (n. 47) because of the serious threats that beset them today: the breakup of marriages, the scourge of abortion, the contraceptive mentality, moral corruption, infidelity and violence in the home, factors that endanger the family, which is the primary cell of society and of the Church.

In marriage, raised by the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament, the sacrament not only signifies the great mystery of Christ's love as Bridegroom for his Church (cf. Eph 5,32) but, in accordance with God's plan, that man and woman also realize their conjugal vocation and collaborate with him in creation. A sound preparation for couples preparing to contract marriage and the follow-up of Christian families will guarantee that they offer convincing examples of what Christian families should be and of their irreplaceable role in society and in the Church. Consequently, young people with a vocation to marriage, as well as already established families, must be formed to withstand the pressures of a culture that is opposed to marriage and to the institution of the family, to live in accordance with God's plan and the inner demands of the hearts of man and woman. So much is at stake in the institution of the family that if it is not properly defended and promoted, humanity will reach the point of jeopardizing its future.

9. In the face of the challenges presented by the future of El Salvador, the laity have to play an important role. If they become open to the presence of the Lord in their hearts, lay Christians will be able to offer their brethren the witness of a renewed life; they will have the necessary freedom and spiritual strength to transform social relationships and society itself according to God's plan.

To make the values of the Gospel present in the world, Christians must be firmly rooted in love of God and fidelity to Christ. I urge you to redouble your efforts to form an adult laity that will take an active part in the Church's life and mission; for this purpose you have useful organizations such as the Institute for Advanced Catechetical Studies in San Salvador, where catechists can be formed for their mission. In this work, I also urge you to pay special attention to young people who are exposed to the attractions of illusory ways of life. Present the full truth of Christian life and spirituality to them, so that they may learn the effective values and models to face the challenges

of today.

10. Finally, I want to thank you for your tireless work in every sector of pastoral activity. I encourage you to continue with renewed hope the mission of leading the People of God towards the goal of the heavenly home as you exercise your apostolic ministry and perform a service for the whole nation. Please greet warmly and convey my blessing to your priests, religious and faithful, especially those who are dedicated to the work of evangelization and those who are suffering and who therefore have a special place in the Pope's heart. In these days we are celebrating the Feast of Our Lady Queen of Peace, Patroness of El Salvador. As I invoke her motherly protection, I ask her to intercede for the holiness of the faithful, for the well being of families and for the prosperity of your country in justice and peace, and I cordially impart to you my Apostolic Blessing.