



The Holy See

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

Friday, 14 September 2001

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

1. I am pleased to welcome you, Bishops of the Catholic Church in Haiti, for your *ad limina* visit. Full of gratitude to Jesus Christ who gives you the strength and who has judged you worthy of trust in calling you to the ministry (cf. I Tm 1,12), you have come in order to reaffirm the bonds of communion that unite you to the Successor of Peter. I hope that these moments of meeting with the Pope and his collaborators, supported by an intense prayer of thanksgiving, strengthen the bonds of unity in the heart of your Bishops' Conference and reconfirm you in the gift of yourselves in the service of the people of God. May the Holy Spirit make fruitful your pilgrimage to the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul, so that your missionary enthusiasm may be renewed.

We "give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labour of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Thes 1,3). With this greeting of the Apostle Paul, I wish to respond to the kind words addressed to me by Bishop Hubert Constant of Fort-Liberté, the new President of your Bishops' Conference, thus sharing your joys and your concerns. When you return to Haiti, tell the priests of your Dioceses, the religious, the catechists, the lay faithful, and most of all the young people, that the Pope prays for them, that he is at their side in the hard battle they face in proclaiming the Gospel and promoting a humanity renewed according to the heart of God! May their faith always be more rooted in the Word of Christ, fortified by the sacraments of the Church, sustained by the teaching of their Pastors! May their hope be unshaken, drawing from the Easter mystery the certainty that the forces of death will never have the last word in history!

2. Your five-year report attests to the turbulent political and economic situation of Haiti. The

considerable population growth and the precarious nature of the agricultural and industrial production have produced an endemic unemployment, forcing many people to leave the countryside and move into the city. This exodus damages the ecological balance and weakens the family, the vital cell of society. In this situation, Catholics are called to participate actively in setting up a political plan for development that would contribute to respect for the fundamental rights of all Haitians; let us hope that the international community will know how to show solidarity in this area, to help the populations affected by poverty. If relieving poverty is a major challenge for Haiti, it also creates a challenge about the way in which the Church intends to teach the faith and witness to hope. In reality, the religious sentiment of the faithful needs constant evangelization, because syncretism and the ignorance of Christians offer a favourable terrain for the proliferation of sectarian groups who try to exploit the credulity of the poorest.

Throughout these years of suffering, you have not stopped denouncing all that debases man's dignity in his legitimate search for love, for justice, for truth and for freedom. Thus you have shown your persevering commitment and that of your communities alongside a greatly disheartened people. I invite you to develop more strongly the pastoral charity and missionary spirit which inspire you. Through your constant interventions, your active presence in your Dioceses, always look to the building up of the ecclesial community and the common good of society!

3. In the difficult situation your country lives in, there are many seeds of division. For this reason it is fundamental to make communion ever stronger and more visible. In this regard, I have recalled that its expressions should be nourished and extended in the fabric of the life of each Church, especially in the relations between Bishops, priests and deacons, between the Pastors and the whole People of God, between the diocesan clergy and religious, between the associations and ecclesial movements (cf. *Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 45). I encourage you to invent new ways for the Church in Haiti to become a home and a school of communion.

Through theological reflection and ongoing pastoral plans, it is up to your Bishops' Conference to foster the growth of this spirituality of communion in your culture, at the service of the building up of truly missionary Christian communities. In inculturation, the Church becomes "a more intelligible sign of what she is, and a more effective instrument of mission" (*Redemptoris missio*, n. 52). Through ever more intense collaboration among those who work in the Church, give a human face to that pastoral charity that inspires you, and draw your apostolic strength from the source of Trinitarian love!

4. In this perspective, I invite you today to make the promotion of the laity one of your pastoral priorities. You need to give a solid spiritual, intellectual and ecclesial formation to the laity, so that they can act in public life, directing it to the common good. Confirm the lay faithful in their vocation to incarnate evangelical values in the areas of family, social, professional, cultural and political life so that they do not desert the places where they are invited to bear witness to their faith! I give thanks for the numerous persons who work with generosity and skill in national and

international charitable organizations. They are zealous witnesses to the fact that the Church wants to serve the poor ever more and remind us that "there is a special presence of Christ in the poor, and this requires the Church to make a preferential option for them" (*Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 49).

I greet with affection the catechists, valuable collaborators, inviting them to continue without being discouraged in their irreplaceable mission of educating the faith of the laity and of transmitting sound guidance and evangelical values, primarily to young people. I sincerely hope that they can benefit from a consistent theological formation, to respond fully to their Christian vocation to announce the Truth of Christ the Saviour. May they be authentic witnesses of the Gospel, by their example of Christian life inspired by the charity of Christ, rooted in their ecclesial service, frequently meditating on the Word of God and receiving the sacraments regularly!

You insist on the need to develop a solid pastoral plan for family life in order to respond to the new challenges that the Church in Haiti must face. It is also important to start and carry forward a family pastoral ministry of being close to young people that helps them to discover the beauty and the greatness of the vocation to love and to the service of life. Focusing this pastoral care on the fundamental values of family and Christian marriage, sustain the efforts of priests and pastoral workers, so that they reawaken people to the irreplaceable witness of the family, the fundamental school of social life! May they especially encourage parents to educate their children to a sense of true justice and real love, which consists of sincere attention and disinterested service to others, particularly, the most needy (cf. *Familiaris consortio*, n. 37).

5. In a society marked by egoism, you must give youth your constant pastoral care. They are often tempted to respond with violence, marginalization, exile or resignation to the blatant inequalities that deprive them of prospects for the future and destroy their hope. I hope that you will take into greater account the legitimate questions of the new generations, who should take on the varied heritage of values, duties and aspirations of the nation to which they belong.

I invite you to expand your pastoral programme for young persons in order to help them to develop their interior and ecclesial life, and to build a just, reconciled and solidary society. Transmit to the young people of Haiti the appeal that the Pope addresses to them through you: "Dear young people, you are the present and the future of the society and the Church of Haiti, who is counting on you. Be the salt of the earth, give the taste of the Gospel to your Country, wounded by many years of suffering! Rooted in Christ, who points out the journey of a life given for the salvation of all, witness that a new world is possible. Be the light of the world, shine brighter than the night, like the morning watchmen who announce the coming of the sun who is the Risen Christ" (cf. *Message for the XVII World Youth Day*, n. 3)!

The Church has always held that education offers an indispensable formation for the healthy growth of the young generations, contributing to make their fundamental human rights respected.

"It will never be possible to free the needy from their poverty unless they are first freed from the impoverishment arising from the lack of adequate education" (*Ecclesia in America*, n. 71). To combat the scourge of illiteracy and to ensure for young people a human, spiritual and moral formation, Catholic schools, in the rich diversity of their charisms and educational projects, render an essential service to the life of the Church and of the nation. I thank the educational community for their dedication to the service of the integral development of the young people entrusted to them. I encourage them to continue their noble mission, hoping that the Christian education they promote will cause the fruits of a culture consisting of mutual respect, solidarity and dialogue to mature, in order to reduce the social fractures that impede the full growth of all Haitians.

6. Dear Brothers in the Episcopate, convey to all the priests of your Dioceses the Pope's deep gratitude for the dedication of their ministry as pastors, evangelizers and promoters of ecclesial communion. I know that they are attentive to the problems and hopes of their people. I know the difficult conditions in which they must proclaim the Gospel. Support them in the ministry, be close to them, concerned for their spiritual and material life, so that they fulfil their apostolic task with zeal, through an active presence in their parishes and by their simple life!

I encourage priests always to begin again from Christ, to find in him the source of the missionary fruitfulness of their ministry and to respond to the spiritual thirst of the Haitians. Daily personal prayer and meditation on the Word of God must nourish their apostolate. The celebration of the Eucharist must really be the centre of their ministry, as it reminds them that they are ordained to the service of one mission, in communion with their Bishop and in the unity of the presbyterate. It is important that they joyfully bear witness to their increasing unconditional attachment to Christ and to his Church, respecting the requirements of ecclesiastical celibacy which they freely accepted.

7. "Basic ecclesial communities" should be the object of special attention on the part of priests. Living truly in the unity of the Church, they are "a true expression of communion and a means for the construction of a more profound communion" (*Redemptoris missio*, n. 51). Therefore, I invite Pastors to remain vigilant so that these communities be truly missionary, avoiding a timid closing in on themselves and an undue appropriation of identity or partisanship. Giving proof of discernment and of apostolic spirit, they will also show concern to build the Body of Christ and to give a place to all the gifts of the Spirit.

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate, you know how much the holy lives of priests, religious and laity are a powerful witness to young people who want to respond to the call of Christ and offer themselves to serve the Church as priests or religious. The generosity of these young people is a great motive for hope and joy for the Church in Haiti. As those with the first responsibility for priestly formation, you must watch over the acceptance, the spiritual direction and the discernment of priestly vocations. It is necessary to choose with care those who do the work of formation and spiritual directors of the seminary. Helping seminarians to build their lives on Christ, will permit

them to become real servants of communion and to remain instruments of the mercy of the Lord among his people, fully aware that "one can never consider priestly life as a simply human affair, nor the mission of the minister as a simply personal project" (*Pastores dabo vobis*, n. 36). Dear Brothers in the Episcopate, sustain the community of the major seminary with your prayers and your affectionate closeness! In this way, not only will you help it to live its insertion into the particular Church in communion with you, but you will certify and serve the pastoral goal and purpose that should characterize the formation of candidates to the priesthood.

8. Through you, I greet in a special way the Congregations and the Institutes of Consecrated Life present in your country. For many years as witnesses and leaders of evangelization in Haiti, they have made Christ present in the most varied areas, and most of all in education, health care and social advancement. It is necessary to develop the bonds of communion that unite the Episcopal Conference to the diocesan and national organizations of consecrated life, in particular to the Haitian Conference of Religious. I invite you to reflect on the concrete conditions of spiritual support and material assistance of the religious congregations born on your soil, whose charisms correspond to the profound needs of the Church. By allowing the consecrated life to be appreciated, promoted and integrated in the pastoral programmes of your diocesan Churches, you will help the faithful and the pastors to discover its indispensable presence for ecclesial vitality.

9. Dear Brothers in the Episcopate, at the end of this meeting, I wish to express anew my spiritual closeness to the Church in Haiti. At the beginning of this third millennium, the time has come to bear witness boldly to the hope that is in you, realizing in unity, by your holy lives and your pastoral initiatives, the close bond that exists, in the Easter mystery, between the proclamation of the Gospel and human development. Seeing that in 2004 you will celebrate the bicentennial of your country's independence, I would like to address your whole community: "Church in Haiti, rich in faith and in the dynamism of your Pastors and of your communities, courageous in trials, renew your confidence in Christ the Saviour! To put out into the deep, open your heart to the Spirit who wants to make all things new in you!"

Entrusting all your Dioceses to the protection of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing, that I extend to your priests, religious, catechists, and to all the lay faithful of Haiti.