



The Holy See

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

Saturday, 13 April 2002

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

1. I am pleased to receive you today, during your *ad limina* visit which, after a busy time, has brought you to Rome to renew your pastoral commitment at the tombs of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, and to strengthen your bonds with the See of Peter and his successors, in whom is found "a permanent and visible source and foundation of unity in faith and communion" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 18).

I cordially thank Cardinal Julio Terrazas, Archbishop of Santa Cruz and President of the Episcopal Conference of Bolivia, for his words of respect, affection and support, while he informed me of the hopes and anxieties that you deal with in your generous involvement in the pastoral ministry. While I meet with the Pastors, with great love, I think of your flock, the beloved Bolivian people who received the grace of welcoming the message of Christ from the first moment of evangelization and who now face the passionate challenge of handing on this message, whole and fruitful, to the generations of a new millennium.

2. In this regard, I am happy to note how the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 has certainly defined Bolivian ecclesial life, with the variety of diocesan and national celebrations that draw a broad segment of the people to participate and stimulate the growth of the Christian life. On this occasion, the Bolivian Church "became more than ever a pilgrim people, led by Him who is the "great Shepherd of the sheep" (Heb 13,20)" (*Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 1). For this reason, to all the Pastors, priests, men and women religious, catechists and other pastoral workers I repeat what I said to the priests last year: "Today I wish to express to each of you my gratitude for all that you did during the Jubilee Year to ensure that the people entrusted to your care might experience

more intensely the saving presence of the Risen Lord" ([Letter of the Pope to Priests for Holy Thursday 2001](#), n. 3).

The rich experience of such a significant moment in the history of the Church and of humanity must not simply remain a memory, but must be the school and stimulus for a new evangelizing dynamism, since "In the cause of the Kingdom there is no time for looking back, even less for settling into laziness" ([Novo Millennio ineunte](#), n. 15). There is no shortage of important challenges to be faced in your ecclesial communities. I wish to encourage you strongly in your involvement, which often seems to be full of apparently insoluble difficulties, recalling that Jesus himself sent out His own disciples to preach while they took nothing with them (cf. Mt 10,9-10) and that Peter, fully trusting in the Master's words, made a catch as abundant as it was unexpected (cf. Lk 5,6).

3. Even if there are many signs that nourish the hope for an increase in priestly and religious vocations, I know well that this is one of the aspects which greatly compels you to make the proclamation of the Gospel more penetrating, pastoral attention to the People of God more complete and organized, and the pursuit of holiness in all the ecclesial communities rich and flourishing. To this end, you must persevere untiringly in prayer to "the Lord of the harvest" (Mt 9,38), in order that He may continue to bless Bolivia with the precious gift of vocations to the priesthood and all forms of consecrated life. Proclaiming Christ must also mean to make young people hear the echo of His invitation to follow Him on the distinctive path of the priestly life or of special consecration, and evoke the experience of those disciples who "hearing Him speak thus, followed Jesus" (Jn 1,37). This is the goal of the pastoral care of vocations, one of the great needs of our times, of which pastoral care must be "an extensive plan ... involving parishes, schools, and families" ([Novo Millennio ineunte](#), n. 46). No one can consider himself exempt from this responsibility which "the entire People of God is responsible for" ([Ecclesia in America](#), n. 40).

As Pastors you know well the delicate nature of this work, which, while it demands boldness of becoming the mediators of the call of the Master through direct and personal contact, also requires a patient spiritual guidance and the indomitable hope of the sower, who continues in his task while aware of the uncertainty of the harvest.

4. It is likewise necessary to give special attention to the formation of candidates for the priesthood and the consecrated life, since the small number of those called to proclaim and witness to the Gospel does not mean that you may lessen your insistence on the necessary standards for this fundamental mission of the Church. Thus it is necessary that you make available for them a solid theological preparation and a profound spirituality, in order that they understand and joyfully accept the demands of ministry and consecration, proving themselves able to "spend" their entire lives for Christ (cf. II Cor 12,15) and put their talents at the service of the Church, finding meaning and fulfilment to human life.

I invite you, therefore, to continue to instill courage in your seminarians and priests, without being

afraid to demand what is required by the Church of her ordained ministers, given the example of the Good Shepherd. I think of necessary priestly fraternity, without any kind of criticism, prejudice or discrimination; of indispensable obedience and communion, without reticence, with one's Bishop, to whom they must give their full readiness to obey with joy and generosity; of a sincere and real appreciation of celibacy and of indifference to material goods (cf. *Presbyterorum ordinis*, n. 14-17). Your pastoral charity will find the way to make these requirements, more than being just difficult renunciations, to be accepted and lived with the joyful heart of one who "on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it" (Mt 13,46). You know how important in many cases is the Bishop's personal, cheerful and fatherly relationship with his priests, by his showing interest even in the little things of daily life that have an impact on the priests' personal and pastoral souls. This is precisely one of the better places for developing the "spirituality of communion" that must characterize the Church of the third millennium (cf. *Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 43).

5. A great good for most of your dioceses is the presence of many consecrated persons, to whom I express my heartfelt thanks for their contribution to the service of the Kingdom of God in Bolivia.

They give this service in many areas, according to the charism of their Institute, from the direct apostolate in the parishes and missions to educational and health care institutions, or social and charitable assistance. They not only deserve the gratitude of the Pastors, but also a constant encouragement to support and increase their generous commitment, in full harmony with the directives of each particular Church. This will help them to become more fully aware that their contribution to the life of the ecclesial community is not limited to the material effectiveness of their service, but that, above all, they enrich it with their personal and communal witness to the Beatitudes of the Gospel, the presence of their charism, that reminds everyone of the immeasurable action of the Spirit, and gives this most important commitment to contribute in a special way in order that the communities continue to be "genuine "schools' of prayer" (*ibid.*, n. 33).

6. A sign of vitality in many of the particular Churches over which you preside is also the presence of many committed laity, who "carry out their own part in the mission of the whole Christian people with respect to the Church and the world" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 31). Their role is particularly important in those places where it is impossible to count on the permanent presence of priests to preside over the community. Their availability to promote catechesis or to encourage meetings of communal prayer and the reading of the Word of God deserves the sincere appreciation of their Pastors who must get involved in offering an adequate theological, liturgical, and spiritual formation for the tasks entrusted to these men and women.

In this regard, it is absolutely necessary to ensure that such lay dedication does not at times create "the temptation of being so strongly interested in Church services and tasks that some fail to become actively engaged in their responsibilities in the professional, social, cultural, and

political world" (*Christifideles laici*, n. 2). In fact, the lay vocation has to play an important role in today's society, in which, as we see also in Bolivia, rapid and profound changes are taking place that require the respect of ethical principles and the guidance of Gospel values, in order that temporal reality be ordered to God (cf. *Lumen gentium*, n. 31). Likewise, no means are to be spared for the ongoing formation of the laity, since they are called to be the primary ones who implement the social doctrine of the Church.

It is therefore important that every Bishop give special care to developing his responsibility in this area "so [to] gather and mould the whole family of his flock that everyone, conscious of his own duties, may live and work in the communion of love" (*Christus Dominus*, n. 16). The different kinds of associations are good ways of realizing this commitment among the laity and it is therefore necessary to promote them as an authentic "springtime of spirituality" for the Church (cf. *Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 33). As Pastors you know the inestimable good which the various lay associations, when they follow the "criteria of ecclesiality" (cf. *Christifideles laici*, n. 30), can contribute both to the sanctification of their members and to the evangelizing action of the Church.

7. As in other parts of Latin America, in Bolivia you are also worried about the proselytizing advance of sects, which often use the same religious roots sown in people by the Church in order to separate them from the sower. It is a sad phenomenon that at times relives Jesus' experience when He said: "If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me?" (Jn 8,46). Without a doubt, firmness in the faith and full trust in the power of the truth to conquer hearts is a valuable motivation that will inspire necessary pastoral activities. One of these should be the non-stop proclaiming of Christ's message in a style that all can understand, with "a simple style, as is in accord with the goodness of God" (cf. St Cyprian, *A. Donato*, 2), and in a way that shows all of its power and attraction. We must always learn from Jesus that, through His way of acting and teaching, he evoked the wonder of the people (cf. Lk 4,32).

In the rich Bolivian tradition there is no shortage either of suitable means of expression able to guide a profound lived experience of faith, nor of solid forms of popular piety which can reach the hearts of the people. The simplicity of these expressions must not be confused with a superficiality of faith.

This advance of the sects must be a reason for great concern, especially when it is caused by your not paying personal attention to the faithful, according to their condition, or by not carrying out an evangelization that is aware of the inner expectations of those who long to hear in their hearts the words of Jesus: "Today salvation has come to this house" (Lk 19,9). In effect, experience shows that sects do not thrive where the Church lives an intense spiritual life and is committed to the service of charity.

8. Dear Brothers, you have had to exercise your pastoral ministry in difficult moments for your country, due to a complex social situation, with various conflicts and outbursts of violence. You

have accepted to be part of reconciliation initiatives, with the sole goal of encouraging a coming together and a dialogue between the parties in conflict.

In reality, this is only a temporary part of the greater task of carrying out a much more extensive work, that involves evangelization and promotes justice and fraternal solidarity among all citizens.

Through you, I call upon all Bolivian believers, so that, relying upon the faith which they profess and the hope in Christ which animates them, they may become the advocates of a society that is averse to every selfish division, to any form of violence or lack of respect for the rights of the human person, especially the right to life.

9. In concluding this meeting, I invoke upon you and your dioceses the maternal protection of Our Lady of Copacabana, asking her to watch over all Bolivians. Please bring the greeting and affection of the Pope to the homes, communities, and parishes, encouraging them to spread the great values of the Gospel. I repeat today what I said at the airport of Santa Cruz at the end of my pastoral visit to your country in 1988: "I carry all of you in my heart and will keep an unforgettable memory of all of you" (*Discourse*, 14 May 1988, ORE, 20 June 1988, n. 2).

With these sentiments I cordially impart to you my Apostolic Blessing, which I am happy to extend to all of the sons and daughters of Bolivia.