



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE MEMBERS OF THE BISHOPS' CONFERENCE
OF THE INDIAN OCEAN (CEDOI)
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT Tuesday, 9 November 2004**

*Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,
Dear Brothers in the Priesthood,*

1. I welcome you with joy during your *ad limina* visit. It gives me the opportunity to speak especially to you, Pastors of the Church scattered across the Islands of the Indian Ocean. Our meeting is an expression of communion between the Bishops and the See of Peter. "What then takes place is not simply an exchange of information but primarily the affirmation and the consolidation of collegiality... in the body of the Church, which gives rise to unity in diversity" (*Pastores Gregis*, n. 57). I thank Bishop Gilbert Aubry of Saint-Denis-de-la Réunion, President of your Bishops' Conference, for his fraternal words in your name, expressing your faithful attachment to the Successor of Peter.

Since your last visit, several changes have been made in your Bishops' Conference. The establishment of the Vicariate Apostolic of Rodrigues with territory taken from the Diocese Port-Louis on the Island of Mauritius is a sign of the Church's vitality in your region. I cordially greet Bishop Alain Harel, Vicar Apostolic of this new circumscription, as well as the new Bishop of the Seychelles, Bishop Denis Wiehe. Your presence enables me to feel close to all the members of your Dioceses. When you go home, please take back to the Peoples of your Islands my warm greeting and assure each one of my prayers and affection. Through an abundance of his gifts, may the Lord be a life-giving source of hope and brotherly love for them all!

2. In the diversity of human and religious situations that make up the reality of your region and taking into account the vast distances between your Dioceses, an authentic spirituality of communion is particularly indispensable. It will obviously spur you to strengthen your ties and to develop collaboration with one another. I am pleased to know that your exchanges and dialogues within your Bishops' Conference (CEDOI: Bishops' Conference of the Indian Ocean) help you to avoid loneliness and to feel an active part of the life of the universal Church. The "Avant-CEDOI" meetings, which enable you to meet the priests, men and women religious and lay people of your

region in order to reflect on the most important pastoral topics, give real support to the Pastors; they also allow the faithful to broaden their horizons to be open to the Church's diversity, showing that her life and mission are everyone's concern.

I would like to share with you once more, dear Brothers, one of my profound convictions: a spiritual commitment based on contemplation of the face of the Lord and on the proclamation of his Gospel is particularly necessary to those whom Christ has made his Church's Pastors. Be faithful to attend to your spiritual life, nourishing yourselves with the living and effective word of Scripture and with the Holy Eucharist, the food of eternal life (cf. *Pastores Gregis*, n. 13). This will also enable you to set an example to all the members of your Dioceses of how to lead an ever stronger spiritual life which is the basis of an authentically Christian life.

3. In this spirit, I ask Christians to live the *Year of the Eucharist* that we have just entered as an important time of encounter with Christ. I hope that the faithful will discover in this incomparable treasure which Jesus has bequeathed to us, the joy and happiness of the loving presence of the Saviour. May they have a fervent experience of God's goodness to human beings! May they all find in the exercise of their profession, in the most varied situations and in their faith witness, the light and strength to live their daily lives in the world and to experience fully the beauty and the mission of the family (cf. *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, n. 30). *The Year of the Eucharist* is also a favourable time for rediscovering the significance of Sunday and the need to make it holy, especially by regular participation in Sunday Mass. The Christian community, gathered together and newly aware that the Eucharist which constitutes it has been given "for the life of the world" (Jn 6: 51), will find in it the nourishment that enables each of its members to live by the very life of the Lord Jesus and draw from it fresh missionary zeal. By extending the celebration, Eucharistic adoration, an inexhaustible source of holiness, will be an opportunity for the faithful to enter into an ever more intimate dialogue with the Lord.

4. For the Church, forming future priests is an important challenge. You are concerned about the complete formation process of those whom the Lord calls, and you have thus come to the decision to make it available in your own region. In this way seminarians will be closer to the pastoral situations in which they will be asked to serve. Our Lady of the Trinity Seminary on the Island of Mauritius already provides young men the first years of their formation. I warmly encourage the team of formation teachers in their valuable service, so that the seminary may become the place for a serious discernment of vocations and of an authentic community formation for the priestly ministry.

I also ask you to reassess vocations promotion and to make it an essential concern of your Dioceses, so that, through prayer and attention to youth, all the faithful may contribute to the birth and development of vocations, helping children and adolescents to discern the call of the Lord. As for you, may you dare to call young people to follow Christ and guide them on their way!

Dear Brothers, one of your principal duties to our priests is to watch over their spiritual life, so that their ministry may be firmly founded in their personal meeting with Christ, especially through diligent prayer and the sacraments of the Eucharist and Penance. This is also a pressing invitation to you to make yourselves close to them, by welcoming and listening to them and by friendly sharing, so that none of them may feel lonely or misunderstood. Please convey the Pope's cordial and affectionate greeting to each one of them, as well as to your deacons, men and women religious and seminarians. I invite them to be ever more assiduous witnesses of a holy life, zealously proclaiming the Gospel. I strongly encourage them in their service to the Church. Their commitment to the poorest of the poor is a beautiful witness to Christ's love for the "littlest" of his brethren.

5. In your quinquennial reports, you stress that lay people in your Dioceses want and need formation in the faith. Their needs will certainly vary according to their circumstances. However, it is generally indispensable for Christians to have a sound religious training if they are to advance on the difficult path of following Christ with commitment. The presence of believers of other religions, not to mention the activity of sects, must impel disciples of Christ to take measures to strengthen their faith and avoid being tossed about by every wind of doctrine (cf. Eph 4: 14), so as to be able to account for the hope that makes them live (cf. I Pt 3: 15).

You are attentive to the urgent need to communicate the Word of God to people in their own culture, so that Christ's mystery may be proclaimed and welcomed by all in such a way that each one hears his own language spoken (cf. Acts 2: 6). Indeed, in order that the people of all nations and all cultures may meet Christ and walk on the paths of the Gospel, the inculturation of the Gospel message is a very important task. The efforts you have made in this area help the faith to truly take root in your Islands, in response to the essential challenge of evangelization.

6. The involvement of the faithful in social life is marked by the diversity of your countries' situations. Wherever possible, lay people must play their proper part in building up the Nation. It is their duty to help men and women attain their full dimension as God's creatures. The Church's social teaching is a precious aid to serving the common good and integral dignity of the human person, particularly by making people understand what actually are the most just and fraternal living conditions in society.

Interreligious dialogue is also essential if peoples are to make peaceful progress. In some of your Islands, the believers of other religions are numerous, sometimes by far the majority, and I know that on the whole the presence of Christians is well-accepted and appreciated. As a humble light in the midst of these peoples, like lighthouses at sea, they can serve as beacons for people of good will, pointing out the way to brotherhood and agreement, thus witnessing to the Gospel.

7. Attention to families and to their harmonious development is one of your pastoral priorities. In your region, as in many regions of the world, social evolution is contributing to undermining the

family structure. It is therefore necessary to remember the significance and value of marriage and the family in God's plan. Christian families must be authentic witnesses of the presence of Christ, who accompanies and sustains them in their daily lives. In fact, their mission is to "guard, reveal and communicate love, and this is a living reflection of a real sharing in God's love for humanity and the love of Christ the Lord for the Church his Bride" (*Familiaris Consortio*, n. 17). Likewise, families are the privileged place for the education of the young and the transmission of moral and spiritual values.

I therefore warmly encourage you to promote an effective family ministry, strongly proclaiming the teaching of the Gospel about family and marriage and offering young people the education they need to understand and accept their duties, taking care to instruct them before and after the celebration of matrimony. Special care must also be given to couples in difficulty, to broken families and to those who live in irregular marital situations.

8. Increasing watchfulness with regard to the education of young people is also more timely than ever. To respond to the challenges of Gospel witness today and in the future, their human and spiritual formation is an urgent need. I invite you to develop a pastoral ministry that awakens in young people enthusiasm for Christ and for serving their brethren. They will find solid reasons for founding their life on the hope that the Lord Jesus gives them and the ability to love as he loved. May all people generously engaged in catechesis take care to be first of all living examples of the teaching that it is their task to transmit in fidelity to the Church.

I hope that the young people in your region will allow themselves to be transformed by the encounter with Jesus, who comes to meet them to make them authentic witnesses of his Gospel and to lead them to true happiness. May they always allow themselves to be led by him on the paths of faith and communicate to their brothers and sisters their own experience of the living God!

9. Dear Brothers, as we come to the end of our meeting, I address to each one of you, and to dear Cardinal Jean Margéot, Bishop emeritus of Port-Louis, my warmest encouragement for your ministry as Pastors, responsible for proclaiming the Gospel to the people of the Indian Ocean. May the Christians in your Dioceses be more and more aware of their personal and communal missionary responsibility!

I gladly entrust you to the intercession of the Blessed Patrons of your Bishops' Conference, Jacques-Désiré Laval, Bro. Scubilion and Victoire Rasoamanarivo. By their exemplary lives, they are signs of hope and models for all who set out to follow Christ on the paths of the faith. As I invoke the protection of the Virgin Mary, Star of the Sea, upon all the members of your Dioceses and on the Peoples of the Indian Ocean, I impart an affectionate Apostolic Blessing.

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