



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II  
TO THE MEMBERS OF THE ANTILLES EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE  
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

*Saturday, 29 January 1994*

*Dear Brother Bishops,  
Chers frères dans l'Épiscopat,*

1. With great pleasure I welcome you, the members of the "Antilles Episcopal Conference", in Rome for your visit "ad Limina Apostolorum".

Coming as you do from 24 distinct territories—so different in history, cultural background and ethnic composition, and so scattered geographically—your Conference is itself a clear sign of the universality of Catholic communion. The mystery of unity in the Church makes it possible that through the power of divine charity people "from every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9) transcend their differences without destroying them, as they are fashioned by the Holy Spirit into the one body (Cf. 1 Cor. 10:17). I give thanks to our Heavenly Father that that mystery grows increasingly among you.

In the course of my pontificate my pastoral journeys have brought me to the Caribbean region a number of times to see first hand the faith and love of your people. These are memories I cherish, and I pray constantly that your priests, Religious and lay faithful will "not lack in any spiritual gift as [they] wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ" (*Ibid.*, 1:7).

2. My visit last year to Jamaica was in many ways a continuation of the Quincentenary observance in which the Church commemorated not primarily an event of secular history but the first enduring proclamation of the Gospel in the Western Hemisphere. Indeed, it was Christ her Lord and the works of his grace that she celebrated, and from this the whole Church in the New World is called to draw fresh strength for a renewed planting of God's word in the Americas.

In your pastoral Letter "Evangelization for a New Caribbean", you called upon the faithful to give themselves generously to the New Evangelization, so that society will blossom into a civilization of love (Cf. Episcoporum Antillarum, Pastoral Letter *Evangelization for a New Caribbean*, n. 10, 12). This is possible because the Good News "renews the life and culture of fallen man... it combats and removes the errors and evil which flow from the ever-present attraction of sin . . . it never ceases to purify and elevate the morality of peoples . . . it makes fruitful, as it were from within, the spiritual qualities and gifts of every people... it strengthens, perfects and restores them in Christ" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 58). The social context in which you minister to God's people, so full of challenges and even overwhelming difficulties, must never lead you to lose confidence in the power of the Gospel to heal, and to inspire authentic justice and holiness.

3. The role of strong *and united families* in building up a culture of solidarity is irreplaceable. In Kingston last summer, I could not fail to speak about the importance of the family. I pointed out that in a context where systematic forms of exploitation such as slavery had helped to engender patterns of sexual irresponsibility, Christian husbands and wives have a pressing duty to dispel the darkness of sin and selfishness by their life-long fidelity to each other and by their commitment to the children conceived through their union (Cf. John Paul II, *Homily at the National Stadium of Kingston (Jamaica)*, 6 [10 Aug. 1993]) . In this way they witness to the truth that it is only through a sincere gift of self that a person can find himself (*Gaudium et Spes*, 24).

In marriage the spouses make this gift of self according to the character of their sexual identity. As wife and mother, the woman reveals and develops her femininity in a deep communion of love with her husband and in nurturing the children who from the first moment of their existence absorb her mental and physical energies (John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 18, 29-30). The husband finds and perfects his masculinity by completely entrusting all that he is and has to his wife and children, and by exercising generous responsibility for their well-being (Cf. John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 25). When so many voices seek to beguile people into a false understanding of who they are and where their happiness lies, it is more important than ever that we Pastors speak the truth: the real measure of a couple's success and the path to their fulfilment lies in whether or not they hold themselves accountable for the spiritual and material welfare of each other and of their children.

Your commitment to the proclamation of these and the other truths that make up the Church's teaching about the family is an indispensable response to the crisis affecting family life in the Antilles. The number of children born out of wedlock, the growing practice of abortion and an increase in divorce are disturbing signs of the difficulties to be faced. These serious problems are made even worse by unemployment, the spread of drug abuse and the diffusion of a materialistic self-centred morality. By *making catechesis and formation for family life a priority in all pastoral planning* and a constant point of reference in the activity of every parish, you and your co-workers will provide the means to reinvigorate the fundamental cell of the Christian community and of the whole of society in the Caribbean. I am confident that you will find the "Catechism of the Catholic

Church" to be a providential instrument for a deeper evangelization and ecclesial renewal. Sound education in the faith will likewise provide the faithful with much needed help in responding to the pressing challenge posed by the growth of sects and new religious movements.

The renewal of the family necessarily entails the strengthening of many other elements of ecclesial life. Can there be any real progress in restoring the integrity of Christian marriage, a mystery of loving communion, unless spouses and children share in the mystery of Trinitarian communion through the Holy Eucharist? If liturgical participation is sometimes weak, is this not both cause and effect of a weak family life? If the "domestic church" is in crisis, will not many members of the local Church lack those dispositions necessary for the sacred liturgy to be able to "produce its full effect" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 11)?

4. Formation in the Christian life is required at every stage, but the Church owes *particular attention to children and young people*, especially in her schools. Catholic schools throughout the Caribbean region are held in high esteem, and I offer every encouragement in your efforts to sustain and improve them. In order that these schools achieve their full potential for ecclesial service it is important that religious instruction enjoy a pre-eminent place in the curriculum. The message of Christ is the key to a student's advancement in maturity and virtue, which in turn is the condition of progress in learning. The light of the Gospel gives young people the strength to commit themselves to serving the common good, and instills in them the courage to face even times of social and economic trial with serene hope.

5. Your reports in preparation for this visit speak with warm appreciation of *the many generous priests who are your co-workers in the ministry* of teaching, sanctifying and governing that portion of the People of God entrusted to your pastoral care (Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, 369). I join you in offering thanks to Jesus Christ the Eternal High Priest for these worthy "stewards of the mysteries of God" (1 Cor. 4:1). Whatever you do to encourage, sustain and help them in their fidelity is an exquisite form of charity towards them and towards the Church. The Apostolic Exhortation "*Pastores Dabo Vobis*" which grew out of the rich legacy of the 1990 Synod of Bishops, exhorts Bishops to promote a well-organized programme of permanent formation, essential if priests are to maintain and reinforce their effectiveness and zeal (Cf. John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 78 and 79). Opportunities for continuing formation are particularly necessary when lacunae are discovered in the training received in seminaries, whether in the practice of a genuine priestly spirituality or in other aspects of priestly life. For every priest the objective must always be "to rekindle the gift of God that is within" (2 Tim. 1:6), especially by strengthening the spirit of loving service, simplicity of life, fidelity to celibacy and docility to the Bishop.

Your reports also indicate that you are taking action to improve the Regional Major Seminary at Port-of-Spain, as well as reviewing a number of other matters pertaining to priestly training. Some difficult questions remain, but I am sure that your fraternal cooperation and your sense of shared responsibility will lead to putting the true good of the Church before particular interests. Because

the staff of a seminary should be outstanding not only for its learning but also for its priestly example, I draw your attention to the *Directives Concerning the Preparation of Seminary Educators*, published by the Congregation for Catholic Education just a short time ago. These will undoubtedly prove useful to you. The renewal of seminary training, together with appropriate pre-seminary formation and an intense programme of recruitment in every Diocese, will help to ensure that the faithful will have "shepherds after [the Lord's] own heart" (Jer. 3:15).

6. D'une manière spéciale, je vous demande de porter aux Antilles *mes salutations cordiales aux religieux et aux religieuses en mission dans la vigne du Seigneur*. Leur contribution à la vie de l'Eglise dans les Caraïbes est une page glorieuse de son histoire. Les Pères du deuxième Concile du Vatican nous rappellent que la source des innombrables bonnes œuvres accomplies par les religieux est leur consécration au Christ. En imitant sa chasteté, sa pauvreté et son obéissance, et "poussés dans cette voie par la charité que l'Esprit-Saint répand dans leurs cœurs, [les religieux] vivent toujours davantage pour le Christ et pour son corps qui est l'Eglise" (*Perfectae Caritatis*, 1). Le soutien et les conseils que vous offrez à ces membres de vos communautés ecclésiales, spécialement en leur étant proches et par les contacts avec la Conférence régionale des Supérieurs majeurs, sont inappréciables pour les aider à rester fidèles à une authentique vision du Concile.

Chers frères, votre visite "ad limina" est un temps précieux pour exprimer et approfondir notre communion ecclésiale, dans une union inébranlable de cœur et d'âme (Cf. Act. 4:32). Je prie afin que, grâce à votre pèlerinage aux tombeaux des Saints Apôtres, la charité surnaturelle qui vous lie à l'Evêque de Rome et qui nous lie à Pierre et aux autres Apôtres, devienne encore plus vive. En toutes choses, un Evêque est ministre de la communion, serviteur de la participation de son peuple à la vie du Père, du Fils et du Saint-Esprit. Je demande au Seigneur d'unir plus étroitement encore dans l'amour vos prêtres, vos religieux et religieuses ainsi que vos fidèles laïcs grâce à votre ministère et, en ces jours proches de la Semaine de Prière pour l'Unité des Chrétiens, je prie afin que vos nombreuses initiatives œcuméniques portent beaucoup de fruit. En vous confiant ainsi que tous les membres des Eglises locales aux Antilles à la tendre protection de la Mère de Dieu, je vous donne de grand cœur ma Bénédiction Apostolique.