



# The Holy See

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

*Saturday, 7 April 2001*

*Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,*

1. It gives me great joy to receive you today at the end of your visit *ad limina Apostolorum* which expresses your communion in faith and charity with the Successor of Peter, for whom Jesus prayed that his faith would not fail and that he would strengthen his brethren (cf. Lk 22: 32). This same faith, which links us and unites us around Christ, the true Teacher, also fosters the "anxiety for all the Churches" (2 Cor 11: 28), which is the duty of the Apostles and their successors. Welcome, then, to this meeting and know that through each of you I cordially welcome the particular Churches of Paraguay, their priests, religious communities and faithful people.

I thank Bishop Jorge Livieres Banks of Encarnación, President of the Episcopal Conference, for his cordial words of greeting in which he expressed the affection you share for the Pope, as well as the principal hopes and concerns of your pastoral ministry. I fervently hope that the experience of this visit will strengthen and enlighten you in adversity, and encourage you in your desire to build ecclesial communities which are more and more vigorous, consistent with the Gospel and eager to live Christ's saving message with joy.

2. The Church in Paraguay has a glorious tradition of evangelization, which has wisely combined holiness of life with prolific missionary activity, as did the first Paraguayan saint, Fr Roque de Santa Cruz, whom I had the joy of canonizing with his two fellow martyrs during my unforgettable pastoral visit to that beloved land. At the dawn of the new millennium, I wanted to stress this aspect of the holiness of life precisely as the master key to every apostolic project, which must have its centre and starting point in Christ, "to be known, loved and imitated, so that in him we may live the life of the Trinity, and with him transform history and its fulfilment in the heavenly

Jerusalem" (*Novo millennio ineunte*, n. 29).

Paraguay also has one of the best known and most significant examples of a creative and daring evangelizing initiative, as were the Jesuit and Franciscan Reductions. Their memory still teaches us today that the "word of life" (Jn 6: 68) approaches human beings with gentleness, frees him from many burdens, fosters his integral development and ennobles the culture of every people, purifying its distinctive values and bringing them to fullness. For "the Lord is the goal of human history, the focal point of the longings of history and civilization, the centre of the human race, the joy of every heart and the answer to all its yearnings" (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 45).

In all this can be seen an invitation to Pastors today to spare no efforts in constantly proclaiming the Gospel and in forming Christian consciences with systematic and continual catechesis that becomes deeply rooted in all the faithful. In this regard, I would like to recall what I said to you during my memorable visit to your country: "It is not enough only to teach doctrine: you must make it your objective that those who receive religious instruction will be strongly motivated to put into practice what they learn" (*Address to the Bishops of Paraguay*, Asunción, 16 May 1988, n. 3; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 27 June 1988, p. 7).

3. In this context, priests deserve special mention since they are the Bishop's principal co-workers in his pastoral mission and "assemble the family of God" in his name (*Lumen gentium*, n. 28). I am aware of the considerable efforts you have made to improve the national seminary, and it is encouraging to note the increase in the number of seminarians. It is important that they receive a sound spiritual, human and intellectual formation, which will continue in their priestly life after the seminary, so that they may be faithful, constant and generous stewards of God's mysteries.

The doubtless need for vocations to the priesthood and the consecrated life must in no way lead to demanding less or being content with a mediocre formation and spirituality. On the contrary, current circumstances require, perhaps even more than in other eras, greater attention to the selection and formation of those who, in addition to being competent in their own pastoral ministry, must practise by their example what they preach. In fact, the evangelizer, living "a simple life, taking Christ as the model, is a sign of God and of transcendent realities" (*Redemptoris missio*, n. 42). Thus a special effort must be made so that priests, far from limiting themselves to the regular fulfilment of specific functions, feel totally imbued with the pastoral charity that constantly impels the apostle (cf. 2 Cor 5: 14).

These reasons prompt us to state the serious responsibility of Bishops not only to organize their clergy's formation well, but also to help them personally "as brothers and friends" (cf. *Presbyterorum ordinis*, n. 7). In this delicate and crucial task, the Bishop must feel affectively and effectively close to all his priests, concerned for their spiritual and material needs and interested in their pastoral initiatives and daily activities. Do not overlook one aspect that I wanted explicitly to stress in my *Letter to Priests for Holy Thursday* this year, expressing "my admiration for this

ministry, discreet, tenacious and creative, even if it is sometimes watered by those tears of the soul which only God sees" (n. 3), since "such daily commitment is precious in the eyes of God". For there are many occasions in which lack of appreciation for the ordinary exercise of the ministry leads to discouragement, especially in younger priests, who should be given special care and attention.

4. In Paraguay there is a large number of consecrated persons, men and women religious, to whom this country's history is deeply indebted and who continue to make a decisive contribution to evangelization today, either through direct pastoral work in parishes and missions, or through many works in the educational or charitable apostolate.

In this regard, the role played by consecrated women in so many areas of Church life deserves special mention, above all because of their simplicity, spirit of sacrifice and closeness to the people.

Their contribution is extremely valuable, particularly in those areas where the dignity of women is violated or insufficiently recognized, and in those where a specific collaboration of the "feminine genius" (*Mulieris dignitatem*, n. 31) is awaited in order to overcome this painful discrimination that still exists in our time.

While appreciating the availability, effectiveness and capacity of religious to respond promptly to the new frontiers of evangelization, the Church has continued to stress that they "find in their consecrated life a privileged means of effective evangelization. At the deepest level of their being they are caught up in the dynamism of the Church's life" (*Evangelii nuntiandi*, n. 69). For this reason she recalls the need for them always to maintain a "creative fidelity" to their charism (cf. *Vita consecrata*, n. 37). She also repeats that it is the responsibility of Bishops to safeguard and protect the rich spiritual patrimony of each institute (cf. *CIC* 586, 2), thus responding "to the gift of the consecrated life which the Spirit awakens in the particular Churches, by welcoming it with generosity and thanksgiving" (*Vita consecrata*, n. 48). This makes it clear that in building up the Church it is "God who gives the growth" more than human efforts (cf. 1 Cor 3: 7). Furthermore, in view of the widespread need for spirituality, which appears as a "sign of the times" at the beginning of this millennium, we must expect that consecrated persons, by virtue of their charismatic origin, will bear witness to a truly evangelical life and that "kind of supernatural intuition" (*Vita consecrata*, n. 94), cultivated with care, which will make a special contribution to each particular Church, so that the presence of God will be kept alive and "a true longing for holiness, a deep desire for conversion and personal renewal in a context of ever more intense prayer" will be inspired in all the faithful (*Tertio millennio adveniente*, n. 42; *Vita consecrata*, n. 39).

5. I am pleased to see that the Bishops of Paraguay have accompanied and continue to accompany their people in the sometimes difficult search for a harmonious and peaceful coexistence based on the values of justice, solidarity and freedom. In this connection, the Church,

which has no desires unrelated to her mission, seeks the salvation of the human being and proclaims the Gospel, whose light "heals and elevates the dignity of the human person, in the way it consolidates society (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 40). Therefore, when necessary, she does not hesitate to denounce injustice and in her social teaching presents the ethical principles that must also guide the conduct of civil life.

Spreading the Church's social teaching is "an authentic pastoral priority" (*Ecclesia in America*, n. 54), in order adequately to face the various situations with a clear conscience enlightened by faith, and to give encouragement and orientation to lay people's commitment in public life. For denunciations and the theoretical proclamation of principles will be of little use unless they are firmly interiorized through a general and systematic formation. This will open a channel so that values inspired by the Gospel can have a real, concrete impact on the world of culture, technology, economics or politics.

In addition to the formation which must guide the faith growth of every faithful Christian, an effort should also be made to evangelize those with responsibility in the various areas of public administration. Since the Gospel also has something to say to them, they must be helped to discover that Jesus' message is also valuable and relevant for them and their personal and family life, as well as for the role they fulfil (*Ecclesia in America*, n. 67).

A particularly suitable way to enable the faithful to fulfil the great hopes that the Church has for them in their own tasks is an appropriate organization which will facilitate formation, the progressive incorporation of the younger generations, mutual help and coordinated apostolic activity. The birth of various lay movements can, in this respect, be an element of hope that deserves the special attention of Bishops, to whom the Apostle St Paul says: "Do not quench the Spirit, do not despise prophesying, but test everything; hold fast what is good" (1 Thes 5: 19-21). In this way, with the help of their Pastors and in perfect communion with them, a vigorous laity will be forged and will be firmly committed to the path of personal holiness as they build up the Church and create a more just society.

6. I would not like to end this meeting without mentioning one of the most precious legacies enriching Paraguayan Ecclesial Communities: popular piety. In many cases this is the way that the Gospel has sunk deeper roots in the hearts of many believers. It is necessary to foster this expressive ability, which involves the totality of the person and pervades community life, channeling it towards a progressive deepening in faith that will illumine all the aspects of his life. In this way, they will be more aware each day that they must grow as living stones which form a spiritual edifice (cf. 1 Pt 2: 5), with the energy that stems from the "masterworks of God", which are the sacraments (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1116).

7. Dear Brothers in the Episcopate, I entrust you and your pastoral intentions to the Virgin Mary, our heavenly Mother, fervently invoked by the Paraguayan faithful as the Pure and Shining

Conception of Caacupé. May she extend her hand to the beloved sons and daughters of Paraguay, to whom I ask you to bring the Pope's greetings and affection. With these hopes, which are accompanied by my prayer and affection, I bless you with all my heart.