



The Holy See

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

Monday, 20 May 2002

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

1. I am pleased to receive you today, pastors and guides of the particular Churches of Ecuador, during the *ad limina* visit that you are making to renew the bonds of unity with the Successor of Peter, the "lasting and visible source and foundation of the unity both of faith and of communion" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 18). At the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul, you have had the opportunity to be renewed in the heart of your apostolic mission: to witness to Christ and to be tireless heralds of his message to the People of God and to all people. Besides, your contact with the various offices of the Roman Curia not only gives you an opportunity to deal with matters that directly involve the Christian communities you shepherd, but also allows you to gain a greater consciousness of the universal dimension that is binding on all the successors of the Apostles. It should quicken your concern for "promoting all that type of active apostolate which is common to the whole Church, especially in order that the faith may increase and the light of truth rise in its fullness on all men" (*ibid.*, n. 23).

I cordially thank Cardinal Antonio José González Zumárraga, Archbishop of Quito, Primate of Ecuador, for his words on your behalf, expressing your closeness and support, and informing me of the many pastoral aspirations that motivate you.

In the face of the problems that worry you, I would like to repeat the encouragement that I offered you during my memorable visit to your country: enlightened by so many examples of your glorious history and strengthened by the Holy Spirit, "continue your pastoral work and seek to find a response to the needs and problems which the Church experiences in Ecuador today" (*Address in the Cathedral of Quito, 29 January 1985, n. 2; ORE, 25 February, p. 3*).

2. I note with pleasure that as pastors in Ecuador you have accepted the invitation that I recently repeated to the whole Church, namely, that concrete programmes be drafted "to enable the proclamation of Christ to reach people, mould communities, and have a deep and incisive influence in bringing Gospel values to bear in society and culture", as I urged at the end of the wonderful spiritual and ecclesial event of the Great Jubilee (*Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 29). To comply with this criterion you have drawn up the "Global Pastoral Plan for the Church in Ecuador, 2001-2010" to allow her to put in place effective, ongoing and organized activities that will contribute to a more dynamic pastoral ministry in the first decade of the new millennium.

In this regard, I remind you that Christian holiness is the final and non-negotiable goal of every pastoral plan and no Christian can "settle for a life of mediocrity, marked by a minimalist ethic and a shallow religiosity" (*ibid.*, n. 31). For this reason, you should spare no effort to promote recourse to basic evangelizing action, without which the outcome of any such programmes would be seriously endangered. Programmes should also include a detailed, well-organized programme for vocations that deals with the variety of backgrounds of the indigenous world with their special features without causing separation, or even less, discrimination. In fact someone who is called to be an apostle of Christ must proclaim and witness to everyone without distinction the grace of the Gospel.

Great importance should also be given to the continuing formation of priests, that, along with regular theological animation, should give a constant impetus to their spiritual life, that will help confirm their fidelity to the promises they made at ordination and bring a living faith in Christ to bear on all their pastoral activities.

Special attention should be paid to the formation of lay people and to their role and mission in the Church. In many cases, their collaboration in the more specifically ecclesial tasks, such as catechesis, charitable activities or the guidance of groups and communities is a valuable contribution to the Church's action and, for this very reason, avoids anything that is not fully integrated into parish life or the diocesan pastoral plan.

The lay faithful also have their own specific commitment: to witness to an irreproachable life in the world and to strive for holiness in the family, at work and in social life. They are also under the obligation to infuse "the Christian spirit into the mentality and behaviour, laws and structures of the community in which they live" (*Apostolicam actuositatem*, n. 13). One must therefore ask all the baptized not only to manifest their Christian identity, but in the sector of their expertise, to be effective artisans of a social order that is more inspired by justice and less conditioned by corruption, disloyal antagonism or lack of solidarity. It would make no sense to call for ethical principles, denouncing certain morally deplorable situations if one did not require those who are active in the realm of economics, politics or public administration to put into practice the values that the Church and her Pastors have so persistently proclaimed.

3. The Church begins the new millennium with the firm conviction that "Christ must be presented to all people with confidence" (*Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 40), faithful to the Lord's mandate to make "disciples of all the nations" (Mt 28,19). His burning desire embraces children and young people during the process of their formation, in which the integral development of their person must include the transcendent and religious dimension. Thus the Church's mission in this field corresponds to the fundamental right of families to educate their children according to their faith.

Pastors cannot be indifferent to the fact that a part of the new generations, especially those without financial resources, is deprived of the possibility of being introduced to a Christian vision of life and to the religious formation so crucial for their whole life. It is to be hoped that with honest collaboration among those in charge in this sector, satisfactory formulas may be found before long to make the freedom for the right of education a more complete and effective reality for all.

Christ's message should also be presented with confidence to the different cultural and ethnic groups in which Ecuador is particularly rich because of its location and history. St Paul's words shed a great deal of light on this mission: on the one hand he makes himself "all things to all men that he might by all means save some" (I Cor 9,22), and on the other, he insists that with the definitive revelation of God in Christ, "there is neither Jew nor Greek ... for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3,28); but what shocks some is foolishness for others (cf. I Cor 1,23).

Indeed, the Church, firmly rooted in faith in Christ, only Saviour of the entire human race, sees as an immensely rich treasure the host of ways coming from the variety of intuitions and traditions, in which she can express the evangelical and ecclesial message. The Church's great respect for every culture enables her to transform and purify each into an acceptable form in which any person or group can encounter the one God fully and definitively revealed in Christ. This fundamental convergence in one faith will serve as a leaven, so that the different languages and sensibilities may find forms of religious and liturgical expression that emphasize deep communion with the universal Church and carefully prevent the existence in Christian communities of "strangers and sojourners", rather than "fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" (Eph 2,19).

In fact, an activity that aims only at keeping intact the traditional elements of a human group would not only jeopardize the genuine preaching of the Good News of the Gospel, a raising agent that renews every culture and civilization, but would also, paradoxically, foster the group's isolation from other communities, and especially from the great family of the People of God that have spread throughout the world.

4. In your country, especially in certain territories, important evangelizing work is carried out by many missionaries, priests, and religious, often far from their country of origin. They deserve thanks for their generous gift of self. By their unselfish devotion, they remind us that evangelization knows no limitations and that Ecuadorean ecclesial communities too must focus their pastoral

attention beyond their own frontiers. In this respect, it is encouraging that the growth in vocations to the contemplative life has made it possible in recent years to go to the help of monasteries in other countries. This is a sign of the missionary enthusiasm that must exist in every Christian community, and it is to be hoped that it will be fostered with determination and great vision.

There are also many other Ecuadoreans who, especially in recent years, have left their land in quest of better living conditions. They often face enormous material and spiritual difficulties. Like the Good Shepherd, I warmly urge you to show effective concern for this part of your flock, by initiating pastoral care for emigrants to help families that have been separated to maintain relations with their distant members, and to take the necessary steps with the dioceses in the places where they live to guarantee them the religious assistance they need to preserve their Christian roots and traditions. Although many will not return, at least in the short term, everything possible must be done to help restore family nucleuses and prevent all those who already suffer for having had to leave their country from feeling abandoned by their Pastors and the ecclesial community in which they were born to the faith.

5. I am aware, dear Brothers, of all your worries in pastoral ministry, such as the instability of many families, the bewilderment of many young people, the influence of a secular mindset in society, a certain superficiality in religious practices, the snares laid by the sects and pseudo-religious groups. You and your faithful are also nagged by anxiety about the precarious social and economic situation.

In the face of all these situations, which might lead to imagining sombre prospects for your Christian communities, I want to encourage you not to lose heart and I invite you "to share the enthusiasm of the very first Christians" (*Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 58). May the magnificent ecclesial experience of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 continue to be instructive, since it brought into the limelight the infinite capacity of Christ's message to reach the hearts of our contemporaries, and the marvellous transforming power of the Spirit, the source of hope that "does not disappoint" (Rom 5,5). Today too, we must listen to the words Jesus spoke to his terrified disciples: "I have said this to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (Jn 16,33).

6. I ask our Mother in Heaven, whom you call upon as "Our Lady of the Presentation of Quinche", to guide you in the pastoral ministry that has been entrusted to you, and to protect all the beloved sons and daughters of Ecuador. Please take back to them an affectionate greeting from the Pope, who is always close to them in all their aspirations and anxieties. Tell them too, of the Church's sincere gratitude to your priests, men and women religious and committed lay people for their generous dedication to the Gospel cause. I always remember them all in my prayers, and cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing to them, and to you here now.

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