



The Holy See

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

Saturday, 18 September 2004

Dear Brother Bishops,

1. In the grace and peace of our Lord I cordially welcome you, the *members of the Episcopal Conference of the Pacific*, and make my own the greeting of Saint Paul: "I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world" (*Rom 1:8*). I am grateful to Archbishop Apuron for his good wishes and kind sentiments offered on your behalf. I warmly reciprocate them and assure you and those entrusted to your care of my prayers. Your visit *ad Limina Apostolorum* expresses the profound communion of love and truth which unites the scattered dioceses of the Pacific with the Successor of Peter and his collaborators in the service of the universal Church. Travelling great distances to "see Peter" (cf. *Gal 1:18*) you confirm your "unity in the same faith, hope and charity, and more and more recognize and treasure that immense heritage of spiritual and moral wealth that the whole Church, joined with the Bishop of Rome ... has spread throughout the world" (*Pastor Bonus*, Appendix I, 3).

2. Jesus Christ continues to turn his loving attention to the peoples of Oceania, drawing them to a still deeper faith and life in him. As Bishops you respond to his call by asking: how can the Church be an even more effective instrument of Christ? (cf. *Ecclesia in Oceania*, 4). Even where the life of the Church is filled with signs of growth, *no effort can be spared in taking effective pastoral initiatives to make the Lord better known and loved*. Indeed, families and communities, continuing to search for meaning in their lives, look to see 'faith in action'. This demands that you, as teachers of the faith and heralds of the Word (cf. *Pastores Gregis*, 26), preach with clarity and precision how "faith in fact has the force to shape culture itself by penetrating it to its very core" (*Ecclesia in Oceania*, 20). Anchored in the Christian tradition, and alert to the signs of contemporary cultural shifts, your episcopal ministry will thus be a sign of hope and direction for

all.

3. Dear Brothers, the vibrant pastoral life of your dioceses, which your reports clearly describe, is an uplifting sign for all. The joyful liturgical celebrations, the keen participation of the young in the mission of the Church, the flowering of vocations, and the palpable presence of faith in the civic life of your nations, all attest to God's infinite goodness to his Church. Yet, with the prudence of a father's concern for his family, you have also expressed worries about the winds of change extending to your shores. The encroachment of secularism, particularly in the form of consumerism, and *the long reach of the most insidious aspects of the media*, which convey a deformed outlook on life, the family, religion and morality, *unsettle the very foundations of traditional cultural values*.

In the face of such challenges, the peoples of Oceania are growing in their understanding of the need to renew their faith and find a more abundant life in Christ. In this quest they look to you, with great expectation, to *be steadfast ministers of truth and audacious witnesses to Christ*. They wish for you to *be vigilant in seeking new ways to teach faith* in such a way that they will be strengthened by the power of the Gospel which must permeate their way of thinking, standards of judgement, and norms of behaviour (cf. *Sapientia Christiana*, Foreword). In this context, it is your preached and lived testimony to God's extraordinary "yes" to humanity (cf. *2 Cor 1:20*) which will inspire your peoples to reject the negative aspects of new forms of colonization and to embrace all that begets new life in the Spirit!

4. En tant que don inépuisable de Dieu, l'unité de l'Église resplendit sur la totalité de ses membres comme un appel pressant à grandir dans une communion de foi, d'espérance et de charité. Au milieu des changements culturels, qui sont souvent des facteurs de division, le grand défi d'aujourd'hui consiste à faire de l'Église « *la maison et l'école de la communion* » (*Novo millennio ineunte*, n. 43). Cela requiert de l'Évêque, envoyé au nom du Christ pour prendre soin d'une portion déterminée du peuple de Dieu, d'aider son peuple à devenir un dans l'Esprit Saint (cf. *Pastores Gregis*, n. 43). Par conséquent, je vous encourage à imiter le Bon Pasteur qui connaît ses brebis et qui appelle chacune par son nom. *Les rencontres et l'écoute attentive* de vos plus proches collaborateurs – prêtres, religieux, religieuses et catéchistes –, de même que les contacts directs avec les pauvres, les malades et les personnes âgées, *unifieront votre peuple et enrichiront votre enseignement grâce à l'exemple concret que vous donnez d'une foi humble et du service*.

L'importance particulière de la *communio* entre un évêque et ses prêtres signifie que vous avez toujours à cœur de leur manifester votre intérêt paternel pour leur épanouissement et leur bonheur. *Vous êtes les premiers formateurs de vos prêtres*. Votre sollicitude pour la formation humaine, spirituelle, intellectuelle et pastorale de vos séminaristes et de vos prêtres est une expression évidente de votre amour pour eux, et cela portera beaucoup de fruits dans vos diocèses. Cette affection spéciale doit se manifester par une attention soutenue à leur

sanctification personnelle dans le ministère et à la constante mise à jour de leur engagement pastoral (cf. *Pastores dabo vobis*, n. 2). Je vous invite donc avec insistance à *jouer un rôle toujours plus important dans le suivi de vos séminaires et dans la proposition de programmes réguliers de formation permanente des prêtres*, pour que s'édifient leur identité et leur personnalité sacerdotales (cf. *ibid.*, n. 71). Une telle identité ne devra jamais se fonder sur une quelconque charge sociale ou sur des titres. Elle est avant tout constituée par une vie de simplicité, de chasteté et d'humble service (cf. *ibid.*, n. 33), qui appelle autrui à faire de même.

Pour terminer sur ce point, je m'associe à vous, priant pour vos prêtres et leur exprimant ma profonde gratitude et mes vifs encouragements. Je salue en particulier ceux qui, dans la perspective d'un engagement authentique pour l'Église dans le Pacifique, ont laissé le ministère paroissial qu'ils aimaient pour se mettre au service des séminaires. On doit rendre hommage à leur générosité. Aux prêtres qui, pour des raisons variées, n'ont pas pu vivre les exigences de leur ministère, je rappelle que Dieu, qui est riche en miséricorde et plein d'amour, les appelle chaque jour à revenir à lui. En définitive, rappelez à tous vos prêtres l'affection profonde que je leur porte!

5. The history of the founding of the Church in Oceania is the story of countless consecrated men and women who abandoned themselves to the Lord's call to proclaim the Gospel with selfless dedication. Religious Priests, Brothers and Sisters continue to be at the forefront of evangelization in your dioceses. By pursuing the perfection of charity in the service of the Kingdom, Religious respond in particular to the growing thirst among your people for a sustaining spirituality to enliven their faith. Such witness demands for Religious themselves daily nourishment from the wellspring of a sound spirituality. *The spiritual life, embedded in an Order's charism, must therefore have "first place in the programme of Families of consecrated life in such a way that every community will be a school of true evangelical spirituality"* (*Vita Consecrata*, 93). Indeed, apostolic fruitfulness, generosity in love of the poor, and the ability to inspire vocations among the young depend upon this priority and its creative growth in personal and communal commitment.

Religious Sisters, in particular, have contributed greatly to the social development of women and children in your region. In so doing they have borne witness to those feminine values which express the essential relational character of humanity: the capacity to live "for the other" and "because of the other" (cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World*, 14). Authenticity, honesty, sensitivity and service enrich all human relationships. What I have called the "genius of women" will also enrich the pastoral organization of your own dioceses. Solicitous collaboration and careful coordination with Religious Orders is now needed to ensure that adequate programmes of theological and spiritual formation - initial and ongoing - are provided to *prepare Religious women for their invaluable role in the increasingly demanding task of evangelization of culture in the Pacific.*

6. Dear Brothers, during the Synod for Oceania many of you noted with satisfaction that an

increasing number of the lay faithful are coming to a deeper appreciation of their duty to participate in the Church's mission of evangelization (cf. *Ecclesia in Oceania*, 19). Your Catechists have embraced with great zeal and generosity Saint Paul's burning conviction: "woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel" (1 Cor 9:16). This passion cannot, however, be left to a small group of "specialists" but must inspire and call forth all the members of the People of God to bring to bear the power of the Gospel on the very heart of culture and cultures (cf. *Catechesi Tradendae*, 53). This requires great attention to promoting catechesis programmes for adults. As general educational standards among your communities rise, *it is imperative that your people grow in their understanding of the faith and their ability to express its liberating truth*. In this regard, I am confident that you will give special consideration to the development of the chaplaincy at the University of the South Pacific where so many of your fine young men and women are being trained as future leaders of your communities. Let them account for the hope that is in them! (cf. 1 Pt 3:15).

7. With affection and fraternal gratitude I offer these reflections to you and encourage you to share the fruits of the charism of truth which the Holy Spirit has bestowed upon you. United in your proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ and guided by the example of the Saints, go forward in hope! Commending you to Our Lady, Star of the Sea, and invoking upon you the intercession of Saint Peter Chanel, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing to you and the priests, Religious, and lay faithful of your dioceses.