



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER PAUL VI
TO A GROUP OF BISHOPS FROM ENGLAND
ON THEIR «AD LIMINA» VISIT***

Thursday, 10 November 1977

Venerable and dear Brothers in Christ,

With great joy we recall the words that we spoke to you at the Canonization of the Forty Martyrs. Here with you, again today, we “experience in a very special way the mystery of the oneness and love of the Church”. For the Holy Spirit has gathered us together, and with Saint John we know that “our fellowship is with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ” (1 *Jo.* 1. 3). It is our hope that in this ecclesial communion you too will find joy and fresh pastoral strength.

We are grateful to you, Brethren, for your partnership in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And we are grateful to all your people -to the whole Church in England-for your attachment to the Catholic and apostolic faith. Yes, we deeply appreciate the fact that your martyrs died to give witness to this faith, and in particular to the Sacrifice of the Mass, and to the primacy of Peter and his successors. We know that generations of priests, religious and laity in your land have lived the ideal of Christian service in the generosity of love. The Lord himself will be your reward.

We wish to assure you-the shepherds of the flock, the guardians of the faith, the preachers and apostles and teachers of the Gospel (Cfr. 2 *Tim.* 1, 11) - that we are close to you in your ministry. We are one with you in your joys and sorrows, in the hopes and challenges of your labours. We are with you in all your efforts of evangelization and catechesis, as you strive to uphold the dignity of human life at all its stages, and as you lead your beloved people in the path of the Beatitudes, in the way of salvation in Christ.

Our own ministry demands that we lose no opportunity to strengthen our brothers, to confirm you in faith in Jesus Christ the Son of God. And so, our special message to you today is this: fidelity-

the fidelity required of those of us who are the stewards of the mysteries of God (Cfr. 1 *Cor.* 4 , 2). Fidelity to the faith of our Fathers: the faith in all its purity, with all its exigencies, in all its power; the faith with its inexhaustible treasure of «nova et vetera» (*Matth.* 13, 52). Your own Cardinal Newman understood so well the demands of this fidelity, and how the organic development of Christian doctrine must be in complete harmony with pure apostolic faith. And many other countrymen of yours have stressed in their writings the dynamic character and beneficent effects of the Catholic faith. With admiration we recall, for example, the insights of Christopher Dawson and his vision of the faith's contribution to the progress of Europe. And other modern Catholic writers from among your people have honourably championed the cause of faith.

Another aspect of fidelity comes immediately to mind: fidelity to charity. The ministry that we are called upon to perform is indeed a service of love: the love of Christ for his Father and his brethren becoming the pattern of our own pastoral charity. This love must be constant expression in our giving to our people the word of God, and in fulfilling their deepest needs for Christ, who is "the way, and the truth, and the life" (*Jo.* 14, 6). In particular we owe this love to the poor and suffering.

And because love reaches its perfection in unity, we are called to promote that unity for which Christ prayed, for which he died. Our whole ministry is directed to building up the Church in truth and love. United with us and in the communion of the universal Church, you will find the guarantee of the authenticity of your pastoral initiatives, and the assurance of their supernatural effectiveness for the Kingdom of God. With charity and humility, without anxiety, without compromise in truth, do all you can to advance Christ's plan: "to gather into one the children of God" (*Ibid.* 11, 52). To each of you we repeat the words Ignatius wrote in his Letter to Polycarp: "Devote yourself to unity, the greatest of blessings".

In the immense task that is yours, Brethren, be confident, be strong: "for God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and self-control" (*2 Tim.* 1, 7). And know that the Gospel which we preach is "the power of God for salvation" (*Rom.* 1, 16).

Brethren, the Lord Jesus is with us, today and for ever. Blessed be his holy Name.