



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS
TO THE BISHOPS OF THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE OF MEXICO
ON THEIR AD LIMINA VISIT***

*Clementine Hall
Friday, 19 May 2014*

Thank you for your visit. I thank the President of the Conference, Cardinal Robles. The address which I have signed, I will now hand to each of you so that I can have a chance to greet you one by one as you requested. Thank you for your closeness. I have learned a great deal from what you have shared with me. You express the serious concern for your Churches: some are suffering terribly from those problems which Cardinal Robles mentioned. They are grave problems. However, I see that your Church stands on very firm foundations. Your bond with the Lord's Mother is very strong.... And this is so important! It is very important! Mary will never leave you alone to face so many difficulties, such painful situations.... Those of her children who cross the border, with all the problems inherent in migration, those who do not arrive at the other end.... There are children dying, children killed by hired assassins.... These are all serious problems! And then there are drugs, which today cause you serious suffering. When a farmer says to you: "What do you want me to do? If I grow corn, I can subsist for a month. But if I grow "opium" I can subsist a whole year!". Stay with your people always! The one piece of advice I have for you comes from my heart — the prepared address is equally from the heart, but this is even more so: dual transcendence. The first transcendence comes through praying to the Lord: do not forget prayer. It is a bishop's "negotiation" with God on behalf of his people. Do not forget it! And the second transcendence is closeness to one's people. And with these two things, go forth! With this dual transcendence, go ahead! Please pray for me and I will pray for you. Thank you very much!

The following is a translation from Spanish of the text the Holy Father consigned.

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

Accept my warmest welcome on the occasion of your visit *ad limina Apostolorum*. I thank Cardinal José Francisco Robles Ortega, Archbishop of Guadalajara and President of the Mexican Episcopal Conference, for the cordial words he addressed to me on behalf of everyone, as a testimony of the communion that unites us in the authentic proclamation of the Gospel.

In these last years, the celebration of the Bicentenary of Mexico's Independence and of the Centenary of the Mexican Revolution constituted a propitious occasion to combine every effort to foster social peace and a just, free and democratic existence. In this my Predecessor Benedict XVI encouraged you, inviting you "not to let yourselves be intimidated by the powers of evil, but to be valiant and to work to ensure that the sap of your Christian roots may nourish your present and your future" (*Departure Ceremony at the Airport of El Bajío*, Guanajuato, 26 March 2012).

Like many other Latin American countries, Mexico's history cannot be understood without the lens of Christian values that sustain the spirit of its people. It is not unknown what Our Lady of Guadalupe, Patroness of All America, who on more than one occasion, with the tenderness of a mother, contributed to the reconciliation and integral liberation of the people of Mexico, not by the sword or force but by love and the faith. From the beginning, the "mother of the one great God of truth who gives us life", asked St Juan Diego to build a "little house" where she could give a motherly welcome both to those who are "very close" and those who are "very far" (*Nican Mopohua*, n. 26).

The multiple forms of violence currently plaguing Mexican society, especially the youth, need a renewed appeal to foster this spirit of concord through the culture of encounter, dialogue and peace. It certainly is not the task of Pastors to offer technical solutions or to adopt political measures, which are outside the pastoral realm. This, however, cannot stop you from proclaiming to all the Good News that God, through his mercy, became man and made himself poor (cf. 2 Cor 8:9), and wanted to suffer with those who suffer, in order to save us. Fidelity to Jesus Christ cannot endure without committed solidarity and closeness to the people in their needs, offering them the values of the Gospel from within.

I know of your commitment to the those most in need, those deprived of resources, the unemployed, those working in inhuman conditions, those without access to social services, migrants in search of a better standard of living, farmers.... I know of your concern for the victims of drug trafficking and for the most vulnerable social groups, and of your commitment in defence of human rights and the integral development of the human person. All this, which is an expression of the "profound connection" between proclaiming the Gospel and seeking the good of others (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 178), undoubtedly contributes to giving credibility to the Church and relevance to the voice of her Pastors.

Do not hesitate to underline the invaluable contribution of the faith to "the city of men for their common life!" (Encyclical *Lumen Fidei*, n. 54). In this area, the role of the lay faithful is

irreplaceable. Their valued inter-ecclesial cooperation should never lessen while carrying out of their specific vocation in order to transform the world according to Christ. The Church's mission cannot manage without the laity, who, drawing strength from the Word of God, from the sacraments and from prayer, must live the faith at the heart of the family, school, work, popular movements, unions, political parties and the Government, by bearing witness to the joy of the Gospel. I invite you to encourage them in their secular responsibility and to offer them an appropriate preparation in order to make visible the public dimension of the faith. To this end, the Social Teaching of the Church is a good tool that can help Christians in their daily work of building a more just and solidary world.

In this way they will also overcome the difficulties which arise in transmitting the Christian faith to the next generation. The youth will see with their own eyes living witnesses to the faith, who truly live what their lips profess (cf. Encyclical Letter *Lumen Fidei*, n. 38). Furthermore, new means of evangelizing the culture will spontaneously arise, which while they contribute to regenerating social life, will ensure that the faith is more resistant to the attacks of secularism (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, nn. 68, 122).

In this sense, the potential of popular piety, which is “how the faith, once received, becomes embodied in a culture and is constantly passed on” (*ibid.*, n. 123), is an “indispensable starting point in deepening the faith of the people and in bringing it to maturity” (Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy*, n. 64).

The family is the primary cell of society and “the first centre of evangelization” (Third General Conference of the Latin American Bishops, *Document of Puebla*, n. 617). It is the privileged means by which the treasure of faith is passed on from parent to child. The frequent opportunities for dialogue and common prayer within the family enable children to experience the faith as an integral part of daily life. I encourage you, therefore, to intensify your pastoral care of the family — certainly the most valued by our people — so that, in the face of a dehumanizing culture of death, it may become a promoter of the culture of respect for life in all its stages, from conception to natural death.

At the present moment, in which the mediations of faith are increasingly scarce, the ministry of Christian initiation acquires particular importance in facilitating the experience of God. For this, it is necessary to rely on catechists who are zealous for Christ and who, having encountered him personally, can cultivate a sincere, free and joyful faith in children and young people.

I will never cease to underline the importance the parish has in living out the faith consistently and naturally in today's society. The parish is the “Church living in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters” (John Paul III, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, n. 26), the ecclesial context that ensures the proclamation of the Gospel, generous charity and liturgical celebration. For this task, priests are the first and most valuable co-workers in bringing God to men,

and men to God. In addition to creating appropriate for formation and on-going formation, do not forget your own personal encounter with each of them, in order to take an interest in their situation, to encourage them in their pastoral work and to repeatedly propose Jesus Christ Priest as their model, by word and example. He invites us to strip ourselves of worldly trappings, money and power.

Do not tire of supporting and accompanying consecrated men and women on their journey. They, with the richness of their specific spirituality and their common striving for perfect charity, belong “undeniably to her [the Church’s] life and holiness” (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 44). In turn, their integration into diocesan pastoral ministry is undeniable; they are “sentinels” who keep the longing for God alive in the world and reawaken it in the hearts of many people, as well as a thirst for the infinite.

Lastly, I think with hope of the young people who feel called by God. Especially foster and promote the encouragement, selection and formation of vocations to the priesthood and to consecrated life. They are the expression of the Church’s fecundity and of her capacity to bear disciples and missionaries who will plant the good seed of the Kingdom of God throughout the world.

Dear brothers, I am glad to see that in your pastoral plans you have welcomed the indications of Aparecida, of which in these days we celebrate the 7th anniversary. In doing so, you stress the importance of an on-going continental mission, which sets the whole pastoral ministry of the Church in a missionary key and asks each one of us to grow in *parrhesia*. In this way, we can bear witness to Christ by our life even among those who are furthest away, and can come out of ourselves in order to labour with enthusiasm in the work entrusted to us, keeping at the same time our hands raised in prayer, for the strength of the Gospel is not merely human but the continuation of the initiative of the Father who sent his Son for the salvation of the world.

Before taking my leave, I ask you to convey my greeting to the Mexican people. Ask your faithful to pray for me, because I need it. And I ask you also to convey a greeting from me, the greeting of a son, to Our Lady of Guadalupe. May she, the Star of the New Evangelization, take care of you and guide you all to her divine Son! With the wish that the joy of Christ Risen illumine your hearts, I impart to you the Apostolic Blessing.