



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO THE BISHOPS OF THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE OF LITHUANIA
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

*Feast of the Presentation of the Lord
Monday, 2 February 2015*

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

I welcome you with joy on the occasion of your visit *ad limina Apostolorum*; I cordially greet each one of you and the Particular Churches which the Lord has entrusted to your paternal guidance.

You have come to Rome with your youthfulness, but also with your heroism. In fact, among you there are several young confrères, but especially Prelates who have undergone the painful period of persecution. Thank you for your testimony to Jesus Christ and for your service to the holy People of God!

Lithuania has always had Pastors who are close to their flock and stand in solidarity with them. Throughout the nation's history, they have accompanied their people with care not only on the path of faith and in facing material problems but also in building up the civil and cultural elements of society, which finds the bedrock of its history and identity in the strength of the Gospel and in the love of the Most Holy Mother of God.

You are the heirs of this history, of this heritage of pastoral charity, and you demonstrate it with the energy of your action, the communion that enlivens you and your perseverance in pursuing the goals that the Holy Spirit reveals to you.

Dear Brothers, I know of your apostolic struggle. Although the Church in your country was long oppressed by regimes founded on ideologies contrary to human dignity and freedom, today you are faced with other hidden snares, such as, for example, secularism and relativism. For this reason, alongside the tireless proclamation of the Gospel and of Christian values, constructive

dialogue with all should not be forgotten, even with those who do not belong to the Church or who are far removed from the religious experience. Ensure that the Christian communities are always places of welcome, of open and constructive exchange, an incentive for the whole of society in the pursuit of the common good.

I also know of your ceaseless commitment and solicitude for the clergy whom God has entrusted to you. Do not forget that above all one must pray in order to receive from God generous priests who are capable of sacrifice and dedication. And the Lord will also give you committed lay people, who know how to take responsibility within the ecclesial community and make a valid Christian contribution to civil society, if you pray for this and if you are able to encourage them to be present, with the strength of an adult faith, in the civil, cultural, political and social sphere.

As you know, in this period the entire Church is committed to a journey of reflection on the family, on its beauty, its value, and the challenges it is called to face in our time. I encourage you, too, as Pastors, to make your contribution to this great work of discernment, and most of all to attend to the pastoral care of the family, in order that married couples may feel the closeness of the Christian community and may be helped not to conform to the mentality of this world but to be transformed by continual renewal in the Spirit of the Gospel (cf. Rom 12:2). Indeed, your country, which has now become a full member of the European Union, is also exposed to the influx of ideologies that would like to introduce factors which destabilize the family, the result of a misunderstood sense of personal freedom. Lithuania's centuries-old traditions in this regard will help you to respond to these challenges, in accordance with reason and in accordance with faith.

I would then like to recommend that you pay special attention to vocations to the priesthood and to the consecrated life. May the Church of Lithuania never tire of praying ceaselessly for vocations! In addition, I exhort you to ensure the appropriate initial and permanent formation of priests, consecrated people, seminarians, paying particular attention to their spiritual and moral life, as well as to the education in Gospel poverty and to the management of material assets according to the principles of the social teaching of the Church. Esteem your presbyters, try to be more available when they seek you, and do not always wait for them to seek you, do not leave them on their own when in difficulty. May you take particular care of catechists as well, passing on to them, through your testimony, the joy of spreading the Gospel.

Finally, I exhort you to have concern for the poor. In Lithuania too, despite the current economic development, there are so many needy, unemployed, sick, neglected people. Be good neighbours to them. And do not forget how many, especially among the young, are leaving your country for various reasons, in search of a new path abroad. Their growing number and their needs require attention and pastoral care on behalf of the Episcopal Conference, in order that they may preserve the faith and Lithuania's religious traditions.

Dear Brothers, I thank you for coming. Convey my cordial greeting to your Particular Churches

and to your compatriots. May the Virgin Mary, particularly venerated in your country as [Our Lady of the] “Gate of Dawn”, in Vilnius as well as in Šiluva and in many other places, intercede for the Church which is in Lithuania: May she protect with her mantle the priests, men and women religious and all the faithful, and obtain that each community receive the fullness of the Lord’s grace. I assure you of my recollection in prayer and I trust in yours, while I wholeheartedly impart the Apostolic Blessing to you.