



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE BISHOPS OF THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCES
OF THE PACIFIC AND OF NEW ZEALAND
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

*Consistory Hall
Saturday, 17 December 2011*

Dear Brother Bishops and Priests,

I am pleased to offer you a warm fraternal welcome on the occasion of your visit *ad Limina Apostolorum*. This gathering is a tangible sign of our communion in faith and charity in the one Church of Christ. I wish to thank Archbishop Dew and Bishop Mafi for the kind words offered on your behalf. My cordial greetings go to the priests, the men and women religious, and those entrusted to your pastoral care. Please assure them of my prayers for their growth in holiness and of my affection for them in the Lord.

With gratitude to Almighty God, I note from your reports the many blessings which the Lord has bestowed upon your Jurisdictions. I am also aware of the challenges to the Christian life which are common to all of you, in spite of the many social, economic and cultural contexts in which you work. You have mentioned in particular the challenge set before you by the secularism characteristic of your societies, a reality that has a significant impact on the understanding and practice of the Catholic faith. This is seen specifically in a weakened appreciation for the sacred nature of Christian marriage and the stability of the family. In such a context, the struggle to lead a life worthy of the our baptismal calling (cf. *Eph. 4:1*) and to abstain from the earthly passions which wage war against our souls (cf. *1 Pet 2:11*) becomes ever more challenging. Yet we know that, ultimately, Christian faith provides a surer basis for life than the secular vision; for "it is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of humanity truly becomes clear" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 22).

Thus, the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization was recently established. Since the Christian faith is founded on the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ, the new evangelization is not

an abstract concept but a renewal of authentic Christian living based on the teachings of the Church. You, as Bishops and Pastors, are called to be protagonists in formulating this response according to local needs and circumstances in your various countries and among your peoples. By strengthening the visible bonds of ecclesial communion, build among yourselves an ever stronger sense of faith and charity, so that those whom you serve, in their turn, may imitate your charity and be ambassadors of Christ both in the Church and in the civil arena.

As you face this historic challenge, you must do so under the guiding presence of the Holy Spirit, who also calls forth, consecrates and sends priests as “co-workers of the Order of Bishops, with whom they are joined in the priestly office and with whom they are called to the service of the people of God” (*Rite of Ordination of Priests*). Dear Brother Bishops, I encourage you to have a special care for your priests. As you know, one of your first pastoral duties is to your priests and to their sanctification, especially those who are experiencing difficulties and those who have little contact with their brother priests. Be a father who guides them on the path to holiness, so that their lives may also attract others to follow Christ. We know that good, wise and holy priests are the best promoters of vocations to the priesthood. With the confidence that comes from faith, we can say that the Lord is still calling men to the priesthood, and you are aware that encouraging them to consider dedicating their lives fully to Christ is among your top priorities. In our day young people need more assistance with spiritual discernment so that they may know the Lord’s will. In a world affected by a “profound crisis of faith” (*Porta Fidei*, 2), ensure too that your seminarians receive a well-rounded formation that will prepare them to serve the Lord and love his flock according to the heart of the Good Shepherd.

In this context, I wish to acknowledge the significant contribution to the spread of the Gospel made by the men and women religious present throughout your region, including those active in pastoral, catechetical, and educational fields. Together with those living a contemplative life, may they remain faithful to the charisms of their founders, which are always united with the life and discipline of the entire Church, and may their witness to God continue to be a beacon that points towards a life of faith, love and right living.

Likewise, the lay faithful’s role in the well-being of the Church is essential since the Lord does not expect pastors “to undertake by themselves the entire saving mission of the Church” (*Lumen Gentium*, 30). I understand from your reports that your task of spreading the Gospel often depends on the assistance of lay missionaries and catechists. Continue to ensure that a sound and ongoing formation be afforded them, especially within the context of their associations. In so doing, you will equip them for every good work in the building up of the body of Christ (cf. *2 Tim* 3:17; *Eph* 4:12). Their zeal for the faith under your continued leadership and support will surely bear much fruit in the vineyard of the Lord.

My dear Brother Bishops and Priests, as I have had this opportunity to discuss with you the New Evangelization, I do so mindful of the recently proclaimed *Year of Faith*, which “is intended to give

a fresh impetus to the mission of the whole Church to lead human beings out of the wilderness in which they find themselves” (*Homily, 16 October 2011*). May this privileged time serve as an inspiration as you join the entire Church in the ongoing efforts of the New Evangelization, for although you are spread among many islands and we are separated by great distances, together we profess “one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all” (*Eph 4:5-6*). May you continue to be united among yourselves and with the Successor of Peter. Commending you to the intercession of Our Lady, Star of the Sea, and assuring you of my affection and prayers for you and for those entrusted to your pastoral care, I willingly impart my Apostolic Blessing.