



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
TO THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC,
MEXICO AND THE BAHAMAS

**MEETING WITH DIOCESAN PRIESTS
AND MEN RELIGIOUS OF MEXICO**

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Saturday, 27 January 1979

Beloved priests, diocesan and religious,

One of the meetings I was most looking forward to during my visit to Mexico is that I have with you, here in the Sanctuary of our venerated and beloved Mother of Guadalupe.

See in it a proof of the Pope's affection and solicitude. He, as the Bishop of the whole Church, is aware of your irreplaceable role. He feels very close to those who are keystones in the ecclesial task, as the main collaborators of the Bishops, participants in Christ's saving powers, witnesses, proclaimers of his Gospel, encouraging the faith and apostolic vocation of the People of God. And here I do not wish to forget so many other consecrated souls, precious collaborators, though without the priestly character, in many important sectors of the Church apostolate.

Not only do you have a special presence in the Church apostolate, but also your love for man through God is conspicuous among students at different levels, among the sick and those in need of assistance, among men of culture, among the poor who demand understanding and support, among so many persons who have recourse to you in search of advice and encouragement.

For your self-sacrificing dedication to the Lord and to the Church, for your closeness to man, receive my thanks in Christ's name.

Servants of a sublime cause, the fate of the Church largely depends on you in the sectors entrusted to your pastoral care. That makes it necessary for you to be deeply aware of the greatness of the mission you have received and of the necessity of better and better adapting yourselves to it.

It is a question, in fact, beloved brothers and sons, of the Church of Christ—what respect and love this must inspire in us!—which you have to serve joyfully in holiness of life (cf. Eph 4:13).

This high and exacting service cannot be carried out without a clear and deep-rooted conviction of your identity as priests of Christ, depositaries and administrators of God's mysteries, instruments of salvation for men, witnesses of a kingdom which begins in this world but is completed in the next. In the light of these certainties of faith, why doubt about your own identity? Why hesitate about the value of your own life? Why waver on the path which you have chosen?

To preserve or strengthen this firm and persevering conviction, look at the model, Christ; renew the supernatural values in your existence, ask for strength from above, in the assiduous and trusting conversation of prayer. It is indispensable for you, today as yesterday. And also be faithful to frequent practice of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, to daily meditation, to devotion to the Virgin by means of the recitation of the Rosary. In a word, cultivate union with God by means of a deep inner life. Let this be your first commitment. Do not be afraid that the time dedicated to the Lord will take anything away from your apostolate. On the contrary, it will be the source of fruitfulness in the ministry.

You are persons who have made the Gospel a profession of life. You must draw from the Gospel the essential principles of faith—not mere psychological or sociological principles—which will produce a harmonious synthesis between spirituality and ministry; without permitting a "professionalization" of the latter, without diminishing the esteem that your celibacy or consecrated chastity, accepted for love of the Kingdom in an unlimited spiritual fatherhood (1 Cor 4:15), must win for you. "To them (priests) we owe our blessed regeneration"—St John Chrysostom affirms—"and knowledge of true freedom" (*On the Priesthood*, 4-6).

You are participants in Christ's ministerial priesthood for the service of the unity of the community. A service which is realized by virtue of the authority received to direct the People of God, to forgive sins and to offer the Eucharistic Sacrifice (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 10; *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 2)! A specific priestly service, which cannot be replaced in the Christian community by the common priesthood of the faithful, which is essentially different from the former (*Lumen Gentium*, 10)!

You are members of a particular Church, whose centre of unity is the Bishop (*Christus Dominus*, 28), towards whom every priest must observe an attitude of communion and obedience. Religious, on their side, with regard to pastoral activities, cannot deny to the local hierarchy their loyal collaboration and obedience, on the pretext of exclusive dependence on the universal Church (cf.

Christus Dominus, 34; *Joint Document of the Sacred Congregation for Religious and for Secular Institutes and of the Sacred Congregation for the Bishops*, 14 May 1978). Far less would it be admissible for priests or religious to practice a parallel to that of the Bishops—the only authentic teachers in the faith—or of the Episcopal Conferences.

You are servants of the People of God, servants of faith, administrators and witnesses of *Christ's* love for men; a love that is not partisan, that excludes no *one*, although it is addressed preferably to the poorest. In this connection, I wish to remind you of what I said not long ago to the Superiors General of the Religious in Rome: "The soul that lives in habitual contact with God and moves within the ardent ray of his love, is able to defend itself easily against the temptation of particularisms and contrasts that create the risk of painful divisions; it is able to interpret in the correct light of the Gospel the options for the poorest and for each of the victims of human selfishness, without giving way to socio-political radicalisms which are seen in the long run to be inopportune and self-defeating" (*Address to the Superiors General of Men's Religious Orders*, 24 November 1978).

You are spiritual guides who endeavour to direct and improve the hearts of *the* faithful in order that, converted, they may live love for God and their neighbour and commit themselves to the betterment of man and to increasing his dignity.

You are priests and religious; you are not social or political leaders or officials of a temporal power. For this reason I repeat to you "Let us not be under the illusion that we are serving the Gospel if we `dilute' our charism through an exaggerated interest in the wide field of temporal problems." (*Address to the Clergy of Rome*, 9 November 1978). Let us not forget that temporal leadership can easily be a source of division, while the priest must be a sign and agent of unity and brotherhood. Secular functions are the specific field of action of laymen, who have to improve temporal matters with the Christian spirit (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 4).

Beloved priests and religious: I would say many other things to you but I do not wish to make this meeting too long. I will say some things on another occasion, and refer you to them.

I conclude repeating to you my great confidence in you. I have great hopes in your love for Christ and for men. There is a great deal to be done. Let us set out with renewed enthusiasm; united with Christ, under the motherly gaze of the Virgin, Our Lady of Guadalupe the sweet mother of priests and religious. With the affectionate blessing of the Pope, for you and for all the priests and religious of Mexico.

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