



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO A GROUP OF BISHOPS
FROM THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Friday, 9 September 1988

Dear Brothers in our Lord Jesus Christ,

1. For the seventh time this year I have the joy of welcoming to the See of Peter my brother Bishops from the United States on their *ad Limina* visit. In you, the Bishops of Regions I and VIII, I greet all the beloved Catholic people who make up the Church in New England and in the States of Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota. I realize that there are great differences between your regions and in the make-up of your local Churches, but I know that you all experience *common challenges* in living the one, holy, Catholic and apostolic faith.

During the previous visits I had the occasion to reflect with the Bishops on the pastoral mission of the Church. All my discourses were aimed at helping them to lead their ecclesial communities to live *the life of faith* as fully as possible. In this way I was able to treat a series of topics which are relevant for all the dioceses in America: the mystery of the Church as it exists in the United States – the wonderful reality of God's grace that I was able to witness personally and that must constantly be called to ever greater heights of holiness; the preparation required for the Millennium, as a period of special renewal of the Church in her identity and mission; the call to penance and reconciliation; the call to prayer; reflection on Jesus Christ as the One who communicates the mystery of God and reveals man to himself; and, finally, the organic linking in Christ of all the anthropocentric and Theo centric efforts of the Church, including her role of proclaiming human dignity and human rights.

Today, dear Brothers, I would like to add to this series by reflecting on the consciousness that the Church in the United States must have of *her mission of solidarity with all humanity*.

2. The Church, like the individual human beings who are her members, is strong in the act of giving. (Cfr. *Gaudium et Spes*, 24) Like the human person, the ecclesial community finds itself in reaching out and in sharing the gift of itself. *Solidarity is the expression of the Church's life* and of her dynamism in Christ. Such solidarity involves *a practical awareness of the great network of interdependence that exists among God's people*. It consists in a firm and persevering commitment to the good of all (Cfr. Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 38).

As the Body of Christ, the Church discovers and puts into practice solidarity at the level of divine mystery, at every level of her catholicity and at every level of human need. All the particular Churches that make up the one Catholic Church are called to live the same universal solidarity with their sister Churches, in an awareness of the one Catholic communion that unites them in the mission of Christ. Each local Church expresses this interdependence in faith and love and in whatever touches the lives of human beings. Each local Church perceives its interdependence in the need to be open to others and learn from them, as well as by helping them to bear their burdens according to the expression of Saint Paul: "Help carry one another's burdens; in that way you will fulfil the law of Christ" (*Gal. 6, 2*). Wherever, throughout the universal Church, the faithful experience need, there the response of solidarity is called for. For the Church, solidarity is the *expression of the catholicity* of her being as she reaches out to all her sons and daughters in need.

3. *Precisely because she is the Church*, she is called to embrace *all humanity in need*, to respond to the needs of all people. The Church clearly acknowledges and proclaims *universal interdependence and the interrelation of human needs*. In your Pastoral Letters on Peace and on Economic Justice, you as a Conference expressed these points well, when you said: "Since we profess to be members of a 'catholic' or universal Church, we all must raise our sights to a concern for the well-being of everyone in the world... We commit ourselves to this global vision" (*Economic Justice for All*, 363). And again: "The interdependence of the world means a set of interrelated human questions. Important as keeping the peace in the nuclear age is, it does not solve or dissolve the other major problems of the day" (*The Challenges of Peace*, III, B, 3).

For the Church, solidarity is a moral and social attitude to be cultivated, a virtue to be practised, a duty to be expressed in many forms of fraternal assistance and collaboration. As far as *solidarity in social progress* is concerned, the Church has seen the need in recent decades to emphasize the worldwide dimension. It is this *worldwide dimension* or universal character of the Church's social teaching that characterized "*Mater et Magistra*", "*Gaudium et Spes*" and "*Populorum Progressio*", and now it has been further explored in my own Encyclical "*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*". To cite Paul VI in this regard: "Today the principal fact that we must all recognize is that the social question has become worldwide" (*Populorum Progressio*, 3).

4. Solidarity is relevant in itself as *a human and Christian virtue*, but it is further relevant in its relationship to *peace*. It is indeed a factor of peace. In the modern world, and when it includes solidarity in truth, freedom, justice and love, it becomes the firm basis for a new world order.

Solidarity is a factor of peace because it is crucial for development: “there can be no progress towards the complete development of man without the simultaneous development of all humanity in the spirit of solidarity” (*Populorum Progressio*, 43).

It is important for the Church to realize that she exercises solidarity with the whole world as *an expression of her own ecclesial life*. Her social concern, like her evangelizing zeal, knows no barriers, precisely because she is the Church, “a kind of sacrament of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind, that is, she is a sign and an instrument of such union and unity” (*Lumen Gentium*, 1).

At the same time, the Church willingly exercises solidarity with *an ecumenical and interreligious dimension*, which she considers extremely important. She lives to serve – like Christ – the cause of humanity: “The Son of Man has not come to be served but to serve – to give his life in ransom for many” (*Marc.* 10, 45). The Church also knows that she must imitate the sensitivity of Christ for humanity; she frequently recalls his words: “My heart is moved with pity for the crowd” (*Matth.* 15, 32).

5. With this sensitivity the Church is called to understand and face *a multiplicity of needs* that differ among themselves, demonstrating her solidarity and offering her help according to her means and her specific nature. This great openness to others has been *characteristic of the Church in the United States*. It is a gift of God implanted in the hearts of your people; it must be nurtured, maintained, reflected upon and acted upon. During my first visit to the United States in 1979, I spoke to the Bishops at Chicago in these terms: “An evident concern for others has been a real part of American Catholicism, and today I thank the American Catholics for their generosity... For me this is an hour of solemn gratitude” (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Allocutio ad sacros Praesules Conferentiae episcopalis Americae Septemtrionalis in urbe 'Chicago', habita, die 5 oct. 1979: Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II, II, 2 (1979) 629 ss*).

I express these sentiments once more.

The solidarity about which we speak is that genuine solidarity which is expressed *in a spirit of sharing*, accompanied by real human feeling, and motivated by *supernatural charity*. It is a social concern that embraces all men, women and children in the totality of their personhood, which comprises their human rights, their condition in this world and their eternal destiny. We cannot prescind from any of these elements. It is a solidarity that accepts and emphasizes the equality of basic human dignity and translates itself into Christian prayer, according to the formula of Jesus: “Our Father... Give us this day *our daily bread*”.

All human needs enter into the Church's concern and call for involvement on the part of her members. As I have stated, *collaboration is the act proper to solidarity* (Cfr. *Eiusdem Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 39), and both solidarity and collaboration are means of defending human rights and

serving the truth and freedom of humanity. How wonderful is the solidarity that has grown up in the United States today among so many men and women of good will who are pledged to the defence and service of human life! How effectively they contribute to that great American ideal of “liberty and justice for all”!

Solidarity is a response to Christ’s challenge and while it is carried out *in the name of Christ and his Church*, it is done without distinction of creed, sex, race, nationality or political affiliation. The final aim can only be *the human being in need*.

6. Among the positive signs of *a new moral concern* in the world, a concern which is increasing among the Catholic people in the United States, are not only a renewed awareness of human dignity but also a conviction of the basic interdependence of all humanity, especially in facing poverty and underdevelopment. Consequently, there is a growing consciousness that peace is indivisible and that true development is either shared by all or it is not true development. (Cfr. Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 17). From this point of view we see how important economic and commercial relations are among the countries and peoples of the world, and how important it is that justice be observed in this sector.

As pastors of God’s people, you have asked them to reflect on both the indivisibility of peace and on the consequences of economic interdependence. You have stated that “all of us must confront the reality of such economic bonding and its consequences and see it as a moment of grace... that can unite all of us in a common community of the human family” (*Economic Justice for All*, 363).

7. The twentieth anniversary of “*Populorum Progressio*” offered the whole Church the opportunity to reflect further on *the meaning and content of true human development* as it affects individuals and all people. This reflection will continue in the Church because of the importance of this theme as it relates to her mission of service in the name of Christ. The integral, interior and transcendent dimensions of human progress merit attention, as the economic, social and cultural indices of underdevelopment and poverty.

My latest Encyclical attempted to place renewed emphasis on the transcendent reality of the human being and thus to spell out again the meaning of authentic development in terms of the *specific nature of man*. Many conclusions supporting human dignity flow from these principles. Underdevelopment in all its forms is more easily identified and combated when the true nature of development is known. The distinction between “being” and “having” is still essential in understanding *genuine progress*. For this reason Paul VI pointed out that the exclusive pursuit of possessions is a real obstacle to development and that “avarice is the most evident form of moral underdevelopment” (Pauli VI *Populorum Progressio* 19). Considering how important *human rights* are to the human person, it is clear that they must be vigorously defended in every program of development. To this end all the resources of human solidarity must be mobilized. It is evident that individual efforts are insufficient. *Concentrated efforts must be made to identify true progress and*

to ensure its attainment by all through universal solidarity.

8. Areas of special social concern are *poverty and underdevelopment*. On the international level the underdevelopment of peoples is accompanied and aggravated by the immense problem of their countries' debts. The individual issues of *hunger, homelessness, unemployment and underemployment* are formidable and call for the creative collaboration of each ecclesial community.

One *extraordinary example* of the creative solidarity of American Catholics is *Catholic Relief Services*, founded by the American Bishops in 1943 to help meet urgent needs in Europe and North Africa. Subsequently, and with equal creativity, the organization responded, on behalf of the Catholic Church in the United States, to other needs throughout the world, and it is still known today as "the official overseas aid and development agency of American Catholics". This organization, which has done so much in the past, and which is still so needed for real service in the world today, exists as a result of the application of the principles on which we have been reflecting.

In the case of Catholic Relief Services, the American Bishops conceived and constituted a whole ecclesial program on the basis of the principles of interdependence, solidarity and collaboration, to be carried out with keen *human sensitivity* and the full power of *Christian charity*. The supreme motivation for solidarity – for the Church and all her institutions – will remain the love that God has in Christ for all humanity: "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son" (*Io. 3, 16*).

9. Side by side with all her social concerns there is and always must be the response of the Church to the even *higher needs* of humanity. Her religious mission impels the Church, in season and out of season, to repeat with Jesus: "Not on bread alone is man to live but on every utterance that comes from the mouth of God" (*Io. 4, 4*; cfr. *Deut. 8, 3*). Like the Incarnate Word – and until he comes again in glory – the Church must continue to show her solidarity with all humanity, being conscious of the central fact of history that "the Word became flesh" (*Io. 1, 14*).

Dear Brothers: in the love of Christ I send my greetings and blessing to all your local Churches as they find strength and practise solidarity in his name.

