



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE UNITED STATES BISHOPS FROM MICHIGAN AND OHIO
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Saturday, 24 April 1993

Dear Brothers in Christ,

1. In the love of the Risen Lord I welcome you, *the United States Bishops from Michigan and Ohio*, on the occasion of your ad Limina visit. My prayer for you in these days of the Church's Easter joy is that your lives and ministry will testify with ever increasing power that "Christ has been raised from the dead" (1Cor. 15: 20). In this way you will be authentic witnesses and teachers of the faith, and so effectively fulfill the mission entrusted to you as members of the Episcopal College. *God's people need, now and always, to be able to count on the clear witness of the faith of the Church's Bishops: "Since in Jesus, the Son of God, we have the supreme high priest who has gone through to the highest heaven we must never let go of the faith we have professed"* (Hebr. 4: 14).

Gathered here near the tomb of Peter, whom the Lord, after the Resurrection, confirmed in the role of strengthening his brothers (Cf. Jn. 21: 15-19), we are joined in a communion that is both fraternal and hierarchical. This union in Christ reaches out to embrace the clergy, religious and laity of your local Churches. With you I praise the Holy Spirit for the gifts and services he inspires in them, and for his power to bind all together in a marvelous unity (Cf. 1Cor. 12: 4ss.).

2. With trust in the same Spirit we continue our reflections on the pastoral challenges facing the Church in your country. Building on what I said last month to the first group of Bishops with reference to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, I wish once more to underline the significance for the Church's life of a better knowledge of *the truths of the Creed, the expression of the Church's faith, the guarantee of her doctrinal apostolicity and unity*. It is not possible to think of the Church without her Creed, without the truths which must be professed by those who wish to remain within the bounds of her visible communion.

Consequently, within the communion of the one Church of Christ, each particular Church must stand steadfast in authentic Catholic doctrine, *most especially through the teaching of the Bishop*.

The Church's growth and vitality, her capacity to sanctify and transform, her service to the human family and her missionary expansion, all depend on guarding the truth entrusted to her (Cf. 1Tm. 6: 20). The Second Vatican Council reminds Bishops that one of their chief duties is to "expound the mystery of Christ in its entirety... to point out the divinely revealed way to give glory to God..." (*Christus Dominus*, 12). The revitalization and true renewal to which the Council called Bishops, priests and deacons in *the ministry of the word, both as proclamation and as catechesis*, involves not only an adaptation to the needs of the times but also – as the Council explicitly indicates – that all should guard the doctrine, teaching the faithful to defend and spread it (Cf. *Christus Dominus*, 13).

3. This is an important point, for among the ways in which the grace of Christ reaches us, singly and together in the Mystical Body, the word of proclamation has special significance. A false or superficial preaching will not serve to actualize the mystery. It will not lead to faith, grace and sacrament. It will not foster the realization in time of the salvation gained "through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Hebr. 10: 10). I urge you to consider carefully the essential values at stake. The time is ripe for concentrating your planned, sustained and prayerful pastoral efforts on reappropriating and deepening the full riches of the Catholic tradition. This monumental endeavor, an essential part of the "new evangelization", will be successful only if it is accompanied by a new fervor, only if it embodies a style of pastoral life which in all things conforms to the pattern of the Good Shepherd (Cf. John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 18). If the "new evangelization" is to bear fruit that will last (Cf. Jn. 15: 16), it is first necessary to assess soberly the present situation. Only then can we ensure a proper response to what the Holy Spirit is saying to the Churches today (Cf. Rev. 3: 22).

4. From recent publications of your Conference and from our conversations during this *ad Limina* visit, it is clear that many of you perceive *a strengthening of catechetics as one of the most significant tasks facing the Church in the United States*. In some places young people have not received adequate instruction in the basic truths of the faith. Parents are often ill-equipped to fulfill their role as primary educators in the faith. Even well-educated adults sometimes lack the ability to formulate their faith in relation to the many questions raised by the wide diversity of outlooks present in society. Pastors may be inclined to delegate too much of their teaching responsibility. Professional catechetical organizations and centers of training for catechists sometimes fail to recognize the ineffectiveness of those programs and publications which do not give enough importance to *the content of the faith*. Certain methods have been adopted, in which the *fides quae creditur* is too much neglected. I appeal to each one of you personally, and to the body of Bishops as a whole, to face this challenge. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* will be a most valuable instrument, an indispensable point of departure for helping you and the faithful to meet contemporary challenges with the inexhaustible riches of the Gospel (Cf. John Paul II, *Letter to*

Priests on the occasion of Holy Thursday 1993, 2, 8 April 1993).

You also recognize that *maintaining the ecclesial character of major institutions*,—primarily the vast educational, health care and social service facilities of which American Catholics are justly proud—presents the Church in the United States with ever increasing challenges. Changes in the cultural climate of the nation call for such institutions to be more active in fostering their Catholic identity, and thereby fulfill their responsibilities to the Church and to society (Cf. John Paul II, *Address to the Leaders in Catholic Higher Education, New Orleans*, 3, 12 September 1987). If the mission and policies within such institutions have too uncritically followed secular models, you, the Bishops, must call them to embrace anew the perennial freshness of the Gospel.

5. Previous generations of United States Catholics made great sacrifices to build *a system of parochial schools which has been immeasurably successful* in transmitting the faith and in offering an excellent educational experience. This has been made possible by the boundless dedication of so many Religious and lay persons, and I avail myself of this occasion to thank all those who give so generously of themselves in this task and mission. These schools, based on *an educational philosophy in which faith, culture and life are brought into harmony*, are integral to the Church's evangelizing and catechizing mission (Cf. Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School*, 34, 7 April 1988). Likewise, they have an enormous social value, inculcating as they do sound ethical and moral principles, the primacy of the person, and universal and effective solidarity with those in need. Your efforts, despite financial hardship and population shifts, to preserve Catholic schools in urban areas and to serve minorities and newly arrived immigrants, demonstrate the firm commitment of Dioceses and religious communities to multicultural solidarity as a requirement of evangelical love. Your pastoral leadership is now required in order to reconfirm the Catholic community in the "deep conviction that Catholic schools must exist for the good of the Church" (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *In Support of Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools*, 14 November 1990, 1).

6. I would also repeat what I said in New Orleans to the leadership of *Catholic higher education*: "the greatest challenge is, and will remain, that of *preserving and strengthening the Catholic character of your colleges and universities* – that institutional commitment to the word of God as proclaimed by the Catholic Church" (John Paul II, *Address to the Leaders in Catholic Higher Education, New Orleans*, 9, 12 September 1987). The Catholic academic community *as such*, and not just individuals within it, is called to embrace this vision, without false dichotomies between the roles of reason and revelation, between academic freedom and the demands of Catholic identity. The claim to be *Catholic* involves a relationship to the Church's teaching in all aspects of the life of such an institution: in the ethical and moral implications of its scholarship, the witness of intellectual integrity and principled conduct of its professors and teachers, and the models of goodness, discipline and knowledge offered to students.

In some instances, the local Bishop can strengthen the Catholic identity of a College or University

through his juridically recognized role in the institution's internal governance. In other cases the Bishops must carry out this grave responsibility indirectly, through the Religious and lay people involved. In every case, Catholic institutions must recognize *the Bishop's role as the chief teacher of the faith in the Diocese*. As I pointed out during my last Pastoral Visit to the United States, the Bishops must not be seen "as external agents but as participants in the life of the Catholic University" (Cf. John Paul II, *Address to the Leaders in Catholic Higher Education, New Orleans*, 4, 12 September 1987). As Pastors of the whole of God's people entrusted to you, you rightly support, encourage and, when necessary, offer fraternal correction to those engaged in the noble cause of Catholic higher education.

7. Finally I wish to say a brief word about *the health and social services in your pastoral charge*. Testifying to the inalienable dignity of the human person and sharing with compassion the sufferings of the sick and the elderly, those engaged in these services bear striking witness to the love of the "Good Samaritan" (Cf. John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, 29). To maintain, but even more, to make such institutions flourish, *precisely as Catholic*, is a task requiring determination and courage. Within the Church and in society at large further explanation and education concerning their Catholic identity and their specific contribution to the common good are needed. Christians engaged in medical research, health care and social services need your firm support in resisting pressures to tolerate or engage in immoral practices which compromise the true dignity of the human person. Furthermore, Bishops should encourage all those dedicated to alleviating human suffering to see their activity as an eminent form of Christian love. The evangelical inspiration of their service must not be obscured or undermined by the increasing "industrialization" of health care.

8. Dear Brother Bishops, your ministry embraces in a special way the rising generation of United States Catholics, the young people of your Dioceses, who have a right to expect that you, and their families, schools and parishes, will pass on to them the treasure of a full and authentic faith. *I am looking forward to seeing many of them at the World Meeting of Youth at Denver in August*. The spiritual preparation leading up to that event will have important consequences for the realization of the goal which we all seek: that Christ, "the way and the truth and the life", be proclaimed to the world of youth. It is Jesus Christ, and none other, who answers the deepest aspirations of young people in their demand for a world of truth, justice and peace. I encourage you to continue being enthusiastic supporters of the meeting in Denver.

There are so many serious pastoral tasks before you as the next Christian Millennium approaches. The Church in the United States is experiencing a period of particular challenge. Her institutions are being called upon to embody ever more completely *the Savior's liberating truth* (Cf. Jn. 8: 32) American Catholics face the challenge of being renewed in their "obedience of faith" to Christ and to his Church (Cf. Rom. 1: 5; 16: 26). In my prayers I commend you and the priests, Religious and laity of your Dioceses to Mary, Mother of the Redeemer.

May the Risen Lord himself support your determined efforts to remain ever faithful to the mission and ministry entrusted to you when you received the fullness of the priesthood. With my Apostolic Blessing.

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