



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO PARTICIPANTS IN A SEMINAR FOR BISHOPS ORGANIZED BY
THE CONGREGATION FOR THE EVANGELIZATION OF PEOPLES**

*Consistory Hall
Thursday, 12 October 1995*

*Your Eminence,
Dear Brother Bishops,*

1. I wish to thank you, Your Eminence, for the cordial greetings you have extended to me on behalf of the Bishops who have taken part in the Seminar Programme organized by the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples.

I am deeply grateful for the spirit of fraternal communion and filial devotion manifested by the Pastors of the young Churches who have just completed a period of study here in Rome. It is a special grace for me this morning to tell you in person of my profound admiration and brotherly affection for you.

Because you are impelled by the love of Christ to proclaim the Gospel in all its power, you generously accepted to devote three weeks to a systematic theological reflection on the meaning and mission of the Episcopal Ministry. I am pleased to thank the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples for having organized this timely programme of pastoral renewal. It is my wish that this initiative be continued in the future so that Bishops from other language groups may share a similar experience.

2. Bishops are called to be "witnesses of Christ before all people" (*Christus Dominus*, 11), building up the Body of Christ in holiness, justice and truth. As "stewards of the grace of the supreme priesthood" (*Lumen Gentium*, 26), your mission is to sanctify the flock entrusted to your care. Holiness of life is of the essence of the Church's ministry and mission. The evangelical demand of

the call to holiness is especially urgent in this period in which we are preparing for the Great Jubilee celebrating Christ's Redemptive Incarnation.

This is what the Spirit is saying to all the Churches (Rev. 2:7): "As he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in your conduct; since it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy'" (1 Pt. 1:15-16).

Bishops are privileged to be mediators of that holiness which is poured forth into people's hearts by the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom. 5:5). By the vigour of their preaching, the fervour of their sacramental celebration and the prudence of their pastoral government they lead men and women to Christ. Is not he – and he alone – the only Saviour, the one Mediator between God and humanity (cf. 1 Tim. 2:5)? I pray that you will encourage everyone – families, youth, priests, men and women religious—to be ever more ardent in their commitment to the Gospel.

3. Nor can we forget that because people are moved more by the witness of life than by the power of words, they have a right to see in their Pastors men whose entire lives are centred on Jesus Christ. They expect that, like the first Apostles, who were the first witnesses to the Life, Death and Resurrection of the Lord, we too will transmit what we "have seen with our eyes... looked upon and touched with our hands" (1 Jn. 1:1). It therefore falls to the Successors of the Apostles to hand on what they themselves have received. They build up a local community of believers by preaching the Word of God in the light of the Church's authoritative teaching and by celebrating the sacraments which communicate the grace of Redemption.

4. Here I cannot fail to mention the importance of the difficult and delicate task of inculturation, a task necessary so that the Gospel may take root in the various places where you exercise your ministry. This urgent priority presents a great challenge to evangelization: the transformation of cultures, purifying them in the light shed by the Paschal Mystery (cf. John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, 59-62).

If inculturation is to be authentic, it must always respect the fullness of the received deposit of faith and be carried out in communion with all the Churches, especially this See of Peter which "presides over the universal communion of charity" (St. Ignatius Antioch, *Ad Romanos*, proem).

5. Dear Bishops of the young Churches: you are certainly aware of the weighty responsibilities entrusted to you by the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 20:28). But do not be afraid! The Lord tells us that his yoke is easy and his burden light (cf. Mt. 11:30). The Eternal Shepherd accompanies your mission and the Holy Spirit is continually at work through your ministry.

This morning it is above all the goodness and grace of the Lord which I wish to recall. He who is mighty has done great things for you (cf. Lk. 1:49). For this we must give God thanks and praise! The Churches over which you preside are alive and exuberant with the freshness of youth, and

your enthusiasm for the Gospel is an inspiration for Christians throughout the world. As Pastor of the universal Church I am profoundly grateful to you and your people for the witness of your dedication to Christ, your courage in suffering, and your zeal in living the Good News.

Commending you to the intercession of Mary, Mother of the Church, I invoke an outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon you and upon all the priests, religious and lay faithful of your particular Churches, and I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.

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