



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS OF BRAZIL FROM THE WEST 1 AND
WEST 2 REGIONS ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Saturday, 21 September 2002

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

1. I am delighted to receive you today, Archbishops and Bishops of the Ecclesiastical Provinces of Regions West 1 and West 2, which correspond respectively to Mato Grosso and Southern Mato Grosso. You have come to Rome to renew your faith at the tombs of the Apostles. The Diocese of Juína and the Prelature of Paranatinga, established during the past five years, come on their first *ad limina* visit, which all Bishops make to strengthen their bond of communion with the Successor of Peter.

I thank Archbishop Bonifácio Piccinini of Cuiabá for his greeting on your behalf; and I thank each one of you for giving me the opportunity, in our personal meetings, to know the sentiments of the communities you serve as Pastors and thus to share in your desire that your flock may grow "in every way into him who is the head, into Christ" (Eph 4,15).

To encourage your pastoral solicitude, I would now like to share some thoughts with you, prompted by the concrete situation in which you exercise the ministry of making known and "declaring the mystery of Christ" (Col 4,3).

2. The *ad limina* visit of the successive large groups of Pastors who make up the Episcopate of Brazil, thanks to many personal conversations, contribute to a strong experience of affective and effective communion, that I wished to emphasize in my last meeting with the group from the Amazonia region. With pleasure I learn about the work you are doing both jointly and in your single dioceses to forge an ecclesial community full of vitality and intent on evangelization, which lives a profound Christian experience that is nourished by the Word of God, prayer and the sacraments in

accord with the Gospel values lived in their personal, family and social life.

In the context of your vast and binding responsibility, I wish in particular to reflect on the collaboration of lay people in diocesan life and, especially, with the sacred ministry of priests.

Special feature of laity is to seek the Kingdom of God engaging in temporal affairs. That your country has the largest number of baptized Catholics in the whole world is no big surprise. After the Second Vatican Council, the Synod of Bishops in 1987 and the resulting Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici* highlighted the fact that the identity of lay people is based on the "radical newness of the Christian life that comes from Baptism" (*Christifideles laici*, n. 10). The call to all the members of the Mystical Body of Christ to take an active part in building up the People of God has been repeated in the documents of the Magisterium (cf. *Lumen gentium*, n. 3; *Apostolicam actuositatem*, n. 24).

3. In 1997, the Magisterium presented once again the principle of the different identities, common dignity and mission and difference of functions of the laity, sacred ministers and religious (cf. *Ecclesiae de mysterio, Instruction on Certain questions regarding the Collaboration of the Non-Ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of Priests*, Premiss). It is important to reflect on this collaboration in order to put it into practice in the most appropriate way, especially in the communities that normally constitute the life of the dioceses and in which their members actively collaborate.

The Church is born from the "utterly free and mysterious decree of his own wisdom and goodness" of the Father (*Lumen gentium*, n. 2) to save all people through his Son and in the Holy Spirit. "*De unitate Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti plebs adunata*" (a people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit), the Bishop and Martyr, St Cyprian says, describing the Church (*De Orat. dom.* 23; *PL* 4, 553). In founding his Church, Christ does not make her a simple institution that would be juridically self-sustaining, into which human beings would be inserted to obtain salvation. She is far more than all this. The Father has called men and women to build a People of sons in the Son, in Christ, through the immolated flesh of his Son made man: in other words, so that they might become the Body of Christ.

The Council opened itself to a positive vision of the specific character of the laity: its special feature is to "seek the Kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 31). All those who live in the world and from it draw the raw material of their sanctification, seek to transform human realities in order to foster the common good of the family, of society and of politics, but, above all, to elevate them to God glorifying the Creator and living in a Christian way in the world.

Some of the Bishops present here may recall that at my *Meeting with the Catholic laity* in Campo Grande in 1991, I wished to cite the "various forms of the organic participation of the laity in the

single mission of the *Church as communion*" (*Discourse to Catholic Laity*, Campo Grande, Brazil, 17 October, n. 1; *ORE*, 28 October 1991, p. 12).

The Church has the goal of continuing in the world Christ's saving mission. In the course of history, she is dedicated to fulfilling this mandate with the light of the Holy Spirit through the action of her members, within the limits of the proper function that each one exercises within the Mystical Body of Christ.

4. Among the objectives of the liturgical reform established by the Second Vatican Council, there was the need to bring all the faithful to "that full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy. Such participation by the Christian people as "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a purchased people" (I Pt 2,9), is their right and duty by reason of their baptism" (*Sacrosanctum concilium*, n. 14).

In practice, however, in the years following the Council, with the goal of realizing this mandate, what took place was an arbitrary "confusion of roles especially regarding the priestly ministry and the role of the laity indiscriminate, shared recitation of the Eucharistic Prayer, homilies given by lay people, lay people distributing communion while the priests refrain from doing so" (Congregation for the Sacraments and Divine Worship, *Inaestimabile Donum*, Instruction Concerning Worship of the Eucharistic Mystery, *Foreword*; *ORE*, 9 June 1980, p. 10).

These serious practical abuses have often originated in doctrinal errors, especially with regard to the nature of the liturgy, the common priesthood of Christians, of the vocation and mission and of the laity and the ordained ministry of priests.

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate, as you know, the Council held that the liturgy is "an exercise of the priestly office of Jesus Christ", which involves "the sanctification of man ... manifested by signs perceptible to the senses, and is effected in a way which is proper to each of these signs; in the liturgy full public worship is performed by the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, that is, by the Head and His members" (*Sacrosanctum concilium*, n. 7).

Redemption is fully accomplished by Christ. Indeed, in this great work in which God is perfectly glorified and men are sanctified, Christ always associates the Church, his beloved Bride with himself (cf. *ibid.*, n. 7). Through the liturgy, the Lord "continues the work of our redemption in, with and through his Church" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1069).

The liturgy is the action of the whole Mystical Body of Christ, Head and members (*ibid.*, n. 1070). It is the action of all the faithful, because they all participate in the priesthood of Christ (cf. *ibid.*, n. 1141 and 1273). However, all do not have the same function, because all do not participate in the same way in the priesthood of Christ. Through Baptism, all the faithful share in the priesthood of Christ; this is what has been called the "common priesthood of the faithful". In addition to this

priesthood and to serve it, there is another form of participation in Christ's mission: the ministry conferred with the Sacrament of Orders (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1591), or the "*ministerial Priesthood*". "The common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are nonetheless related to each other. Each of them in its own special way is a participation in the one priesthood of Christ. The ministerial priest, by the sacred power he enjoys, moulds and rules the priestly people. Acting in the person of Christ, he brings about the Eucharistic Sacrifice, and offers it to God in the name of all the people. For their part, the faithful join in the offering of the Eucharist by virtue of their royal priesthood. They likewise exercise that priesthood by receiving the sacraments, by prayer and thanksgiving, by the witness of a holy life, and by self-denial and active charity" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 10).

5. To prescind from this essential difference and mutual relationship of the ministerial priesthood and the common priesthood of the faithful to each other has had immediate repercussions on liturgical celebrations that are the actions of the organically structured Church.

I wanted to recall these declarations of the Magisterium of the Church, certain that, although you know them yourselves, you will once more explain them clearly, so that lay people may avoid exercising in the liturgy the functions that belong exclusively to the ministerial priest since he alone acts specifically *in persona Christi capitis* (*in the person of Christ the head*).

I have already had occasion to refer to the confusion and the idea of an equivalence between the common priesthood and the ministerial priesthood. I have also mentioned the scarce observance of certain ecclesiastical norms and laws, the arbitrary interpretation of the concept of "supply", to the tendency toward the "*clericalization*" of the lay faithful etc., pointing out that "it is also necessary that Pastors guard against a facile yet abusive recourse to a presumed 'situation of emergency' or to '*supply by necessity*' where objectively this does not exist or where alternative possibilities could exist through better pastoral planning" (*Christifideles laici*, n. 23).

I wish to recall here that non ordained lay persons can exercise tasks and functions of collaboration in the pastoral service when they have been properly prepared for that by their Pastors and in accord with the prescriptions of law (can. 228 1). Likewise, those who do not have an active or passive voice in Presbyteral Councils are deacons, non-ordained members of the faithful, priests who have lost the clerical state or in some way have abandoned the sacred ministry (cf. *Ecclesiae de mysterio*, Art. 5).

Lastly, I also remind you that the members of Diocesan or Parochial Pastoral Councils only enjoy a *consultative vote*, which for that reason cannot become deliberative (*ibid.*).

The Bishop will listen to the faithful, clergy and laity to form an opinion, even if the latter cannot formulate the definitive judgement of the Church, which belongs only to the Bishop to discern and pronounce, not as a mere matter of conscience, but as the Teacher of the Faith (cann. 212 and

512 2). In this way one will avoid viewing the Pastoral Council in a restrictive way as the representative body or spokesman for the faithful of the diocese.

6. In a broad context, without wishing to depart from the considerations I have just made, I would also like to bring up the issue of the revival of the permanent diaconate for married men, which after the Council has greatly enriched the mission of the Church.

In fact, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* considers it appropriate and useful ... "in the liturgical and pastoral life ... in its social and charitable works" (n. 1571). There is no doubt that the collaboration which the permanent deacon offers to the Church, especially where there is a shortage of priests, is a great blessing for ecclesial life. In Brazil you have set up the *National Commission of Deacons* with the task of making sure that their characteristic service may be put into practice, under the authority of the bishops, where it is requested for the good of the faithful. Of course, the service of the permanent deacon is, and always will be, limited to the prescriptions of law, since it is for priests to exercise the full ministerial power. In this way one will avoid the risk of ambiguity that can confuse the faithful, especially in liturgical celebrations.

Pastors must also feel the need to foster the pastoral care of the vocations of the young men who, out of love for God and his Church, want to dedicate themselves in real and definitive *apostolic celibacy* with moral rectitude and true spiritual freedom for the sake of God. The proposal of priestly celibacy that the Church makes is clear in its requirements: priests must embrace perfect continence for the Kingdom of Heaven.

7. At the end of this meeting, I warmly ask you to convey my cordial remembrance to the members of your dioceses in Mato Grosso. I am thinking in particular of young people, setting out on their ecclesial journey. May you share in the experience of those older diocesan communities, and be encouraged to live with joy your faith in Christ our Saviour.

I entrust your resolutions and pastoral plans to the motherly protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary, who is always invoked in Brazil with great fervour as the *Senhora Aparecida*. I likewise take this opportunity to greet the priests, all the ministers of the Church, the permanent deacons, the communities of consecrated persons, the parishes, the Christian Associations, the families, the elderly, and all who are suffering from every kind of physical or moral pain. I gladly remember the young people and children, the object of my great hopes; lastly, I assure all of your diocesans of Mato Grosso and Southern Mato Grosso of my affection and encouragement to live their Christian vocation in union with God our Lord and with the Successor of Peter, with the Apostolic Blessing that I cordially impart to them.