



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE FIRST GROUP OF BISHOPS OF COLOMBIA
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Thursday, 17 June 2004

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

1. I am pleased to offer you a cordial greeting, Bishops from the Ecclesiastical Provinces of Medellín, Barranquilla, Cali, Cartagena, Manizales, Popayán and Santa Fe de Antioquia who form the first group to come on an *ad limina* visit from beloved Colombia. During your pilgrimage to the tombs of the Holy Apostles, Peter and Paul, and at your meetings with the Bishop of Rome and his collaborators, you will find new dynamism to continue your episcopal mission, aware that Christ is present in his Church (cf. Mt 28: 20) and guides her with the power of his Spirit so that she may be a sign of salvation in the midst of the world. May he, the Teacher of Pastors, fill you with hope and make you his witnesses in your lives (cf. I Pt 3: 15), so that you may build up all the faithful entrusted to your pastoral care.

I am grateful to Archbishop Alberto Giraldo Jaramillo of Medellín for his kind words, renewing the attachment of each of you and of the Ecclesial Communities you preside over in the name of the Lord, at the same time presenting to me the pastoral orientations that guide your ministry so that the men and women of Colombia may walk towards intimate communion with the Triune God and live in peace as members of one great, united family.

2. Your presence prompts me to renew the closeness and affection that I feel for your Country. I remember my Pastoral Visit there in 1986 in order to sow "the peace of Christ through the paths of Colombia". Those were unforgettable days filled with activity, in which I could see for myself the hopeful faces of the Colombians, appreciate the work the Church carries out with such enthusiasm, address a word of encouragement to everyone and remind them of God's ineffable love for each one of us.

The Church in this Nation has continued to bear fruits of holiness. In recent years, I have had the opportunity to raise to the honour of the altars two new Blesseds who came precisely from your regions: the generous priest, Mariano Euse, in the year 2000, and more recently, Mother Laura Montoya, venerated as the mother of the Indigenous peoples. Earlier, a group of young Colombian students of the Hospitaller Order won the palm of martyrdom and were beatified in 1992. These examples of holiness are precious pearls that adorn the ecclesial history of your Country, part of whose rich spiritual heritage is the Christian faith.

3. You are making your *ad limina* visit after the celebration of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, which was "'a river of living water', the water that continually flows 'from the throne of God and of the Lamb' (cf. Rv 22: 1) [and] has been poured out on the Church" (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, n. 1). You have come to Rome, therefore, equipped with a torrent of grace that has given new life to your particular Churches. There are, consequently, reasons for hope in the future, working at the service of the Kingdom of God, inspired by the words of Jesus Christ: "Duc in altum!" (put out into the deep) (Lk 5: 4).

Borrowing the words of Jesus that I suggested as the theme for the Third Christian Millennium, I would like to encourage you to persevere undaunted and with complete confidence in the Lord in the task of evangelization, the fundamental mission of the Church. Indeed, Jesus entrusted this task to his Apostles before ascending into Heaven to be seated at the right hand of the Father, an event that we celebrated in the liturgy not long ago. On that occasion, Jesus said to them: "Go into all the world" (Mk 16: 15), assuring them at the same time of his close and mysterious presence.

4. The Church, faithful to the mandate of Jesus, continues to make evangelization her main activity. Evangelization involves many aspects, all of which are important, but concrete circumstances according to time and place dictate the priorities and ensure that none are neglected. In the particular case of your Country where an internal conflict has dragged on for years, taking a heavy toll of innocent victims, causing great pain to families and society, generating poverty and insecurity and limiting the potential for integral development, you are aware that you must give priority in your pastoral options to peace and reconciliation and thus contribute to building society on the solid Christian pillars of truth, justice, love and freedom, and to fostering forgiveness which is born from a sincere desire for reconciliation with God and with the brethren.

Two years ago on the occasion of the Centenary of the Consecration of Colombia to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, a devout practice that has been renewed in many communities of your Country, I wrote: "A society that listens to and obeys Christ's message moves on the way to true peace, rejects every kind of violence and conceives of new ways of harmonious living, takes the reliable and sound path of justice, reconciliation and forgiveness, and fosters bonds of unity, fraternity and respect for each person" (9 May 2002; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 19 June, p. 4, n. 4). Never hesitate to devote all your pastoral zeal and commitment to promoting reconciliation that

derives from evangelization, with the deep conviction that it will illumine the action of lay Christians and be an effective and permanent remedy to the harsh and serious evils that currently trouble many citizens of your Nation because of the civil war that has caused so many deaths, even of servants of the Gospel. Among these, I would like to recall Archbishop Isaías Duarte of Cali, as well as the priests and Religious assassinated in recent years. This grievous situation has reduced many Colombians to poverty and to running the risk of fostering a culture of death and violence instead of the culture of life and solidarity that so truly befits your Catholic origins.

5. Another field of pastoral action that demands special attention is the promotion and defence of the family institution, attacked today on many fronts by multiple and subtle arguments. We are witnessing a trend, in some places most widespread, that tends to weaken its true nature.

I am aware of the commitment you devote to defending and promoting this institution that owes its origin to God and his plan of salvation (cf. *Familiaris Consortio*, n. 49). It is therefore necessary to continue to proclaim firmly the truth about marriage and the family established by God as an authentic service to society. Failing to do so would be a grave pastoral omission that would lead believers into error as well as those who have the serious responsibility of making decisions for the Nation's common good. This truth is not only valid for Catholics but for all men and women without distinction, since marriage and the family are an irreplaceable good for society, which cannot remain indifferent to its belittlement or the loss of its identity.

In this regard, family ministry, carried out above all by couples who belong to movements or associations for marriage spirituality and who set an example in the education of their children, must guide young couples and families in difficulty as well as those who are preparing for marriage in order to discover the values of Christian matrimony and to be faithful to the commitment they assume in receiving this sacrament. At the same time, it is important to teach them that in conceiving children, they must follow the criterion of responsible parenthood and must also see to their human and religious formation at home in an atmosphere of serene coexistence and tenderness, as an expression of God's love for each one of his children.

6. A sign of hope for the Church in Colombia is the new flourishing of vocations that marks your Ecclesial Communities and is an expression of their vitality. The region you come from is rich in priestly and Religious vocations and your seminaries are a special blessing for the Church, as the priests they train serve not only in your own particular Churches, but some are also ready to work in other needier areas.

I therefore encourage you to continue on this path of assiduously preparing the vocations' apostolate of the future, aware of each Ecclesial Community's irreplaceable role in this ministry. Above all, it must be based on constant prayer to the Lord of the harvest to send workers into his harvest and to teach children and young people to confront the challenges of Christian life, disposing them to hear the divine call to follow Christ on the journey of priestly or consecrated life

by means of the evangelical counsels.

7. Dear Brothers, with these thoughts, I want to encourage you in your service to the pilgrim Church of God in Colombia. When you return to your Dioceses, urge your priests, consecrated persons and lay faithful to live their faith in Christ. Take my greeting to young people, called to be the "dawn sentinels" of this new millennium and the hope of the Church and the Nation; in particular, I am thinking of young Colombians who are training at seminaries or formation houses for the priesthood or the Religious life; of families, schools of rich humanity and Christian virtues, and most especially those families suffering because of the kidnapping of one or other of their members; of the poor and the needy, who must always be the subject of your care and attention; of professionals in the different areas of human activity, so that they may be builders of a renewed society in this very particular period of your history; and of the sick and the elderly.

May the Blessings of the Lord be poured out upon you and your Christian communities through the intercession of Our Lady of Chiquinquirá, Mother of all Colombians, whose hand extends the rosary, "a prayer for peace..., the bond of communion and fraternity which unites us all in Christ". As a confirmation of these wishes, may you be accompanied by the Apostolic Blessing which I am pleased to impart to you and extend to all the members of your Dioceses.