



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL I  
TO A GROUP OF AMERICAN BISHOPS  
ON THEIR « AD LIMINA » VISIT**

*Thursday, 21 September 1978*

*Dear Brothers in Christ,* It is a real pleasure for us to meet, for the first time, a group of American Bishops making their *ad limina* visit. With all our heart we welcome you; we want you to feel at home, to feel the joy of being together in the family. Our great desire at this time is to confirm you all in your faith and in your service to God's people; we want to keep alive the ministry of Peter in the Church. Since becoming Pope, we have studied with particular attention the wise teaching that our beloved predecessor Paul VI gave earlier this year to the United States' Bishops on the subjects of the Church's Ministry of Reconciliation, on promoting life and on fostering devotion to the Eucharist. His teaching is ours; and we renew the encouragement and guidance that he gave you in those discourses. Although we are new in the Pontificate - just a beginner - we too want to choose topics that deeply touch the life of the Church and that will be very relevant to your episcopal ministry. We believe that the Christian family is a good place to start. The Christian family is so important, and its role is so basic in transforming the world and in building up the Kingdom of God, that the Council called it a "domestic Church" (*Lumen Gentium*, 11). Let us never grow tired of proclaiming the family as a community of love: conjugal love unites the couple and is procreative of new life; it mirrors the divine love, is communicated, and in the words of "Gaudium et Spes", is actually a sharing in the covenant of love of Christ and his Church (*Gaudium et Spes*, 48). We were all given the great grace of being born into such a community of love; it will be easy for us to uphold its value. And then we must encourage parents in their role as educators of their children - the first catechists and the best ones. What a great task and challenge they have: to teach children the love of God, to make it something real for them. And by God's grace, how easily some families can fulfill the role of being a *primum seminarium* (*Optatam Totius*, 2): the germ of a vocation to the priesthood is nourished through family prayer, the example of faith and the support of love. What a wonderful thing it is when families realize the power they have for the sanctification of husband and wife and the reciprocal influence between parents and children. And then, by the loving witness of their lives, families can bring Christ's Gospel to others. A vivid realization of the sharing of the laity - and especially the family - in the salvific mission of the Church is one of the greatest legacies of the Second Vatican Council. We can never thank God enough for this gift. It is up to us to keep this realization strong, by supporting and defending the family - each and every family. Our own ministry is so vital: to preach the word of God and to celebrate the Sacraments. It is from them that our people draw their strength and joy. Ours too is the role of encouraging families to fidelity to the law of God and the Church. We need never fear to proclaim all the exigencies of God's word, for Christ is with us and says today as before: "He who hears you hears

me" (*Luc. 10, 16*). In particular, the indissolubility of Christian marriage is important; although it is a difficult part of our message, we must proclaim it faithfully as part of God's word, part of the mystery of faith. At the same time we are close to our people in their problems and difficulties. They must always know that we love them. Today we want to express our admiration and praise for all the efforts being made to guard and preserve the family as God made it, as God wants it. All over the world Christian families are trying to fulfill their wonderful calling and we are close to all of them. And priests and religious are trying to support and assist them - and all these efforts are worthy of the greatest praise. Our special support goes to those who help couples preparing for Christian marriage by offering them the full teaching of the Church and by encouraging them in the highest ideals of the Christian family. We wish to add a particular word of praise also for those, especially priests, who work so generously and devotedly in ecclesiastical tribunals, in fidelity to the doctrine of the Church, to safeguard the marriage bond, to give witness to its indissolubility in accordance with the teaching of Jesus, and to assist families in need. The holiness of the Christian family is indeed a most apt means for producing the serene renewal of the Church which the Council so eagerly desired. Through family prayer, the *ecclesia domestica* becomes an effective reality and leads to the transformation of the world. And all the efforts of parents to instill God's love into their children and to support them by the example of faith constitute a most relevant apostolate for the twentieth century. Parents with special problems are worthy of our particular pastoral care, and all our love. Dear Brothers, we want you to know where our priorities lie. Let us do everything we can for the Christian family, so that our people may fulfill their great vocation in Christian joy and share intimately and effectively in the Church's mission - Christ's mission - of salvation. And be assured that you yourselves have our full support in the love of the Lord Jesus, and we give you all our Apostolic Blessing. *The response of Mons. Power to the Holy Father.*

Most Holy Father: It is my rare privilege as the senior metropolitan of Region XII of the Church in the United States of America, and as one of forty-five American Bishops presently in Rome participating in a month-long program of theological and Scriptural renewal and enrichment, to speak for those here present, and to thank Your Holiness from the bottom of our hearts for the honor of this unique visit with you. The Archbishops and Bishops in this audience hall represent many thousands of priests, and many more thousands of men and women religious, as well as several millions of the Catholic faithful, from every part of the United States of America. In receiving us today Your Holiness has honored not only us but also the members of our respective Archdioceses and Dioceses. We are most grateful to be the favored recipients of your benevolent and gracious kindness. The Bishops of Region XII who are here in Rome on their *ad limina* visit are from three ecclesiastical provinces of the northwestern corner of the United States. We are here to greet you as our spiritual Father, and to assure Your Holiness that we pledge our obedience, our loyalty and our support to you as the successor of St. Peter and Vicar of Christ on earth. Our eleven Dioceses, situated in five states, comprise an area of over one million square miles, just about one third the size of all of Europe. The geography alone suggests the futility of developing a profile that might be described as the Church of the Pacific Northwest. Unlike the Dioceses of the eastern portion of the United States, the Dioceses of Region XII are for the most part rural in character with an industrial and agricultural economy. While the parishes in our large cities number as many as ten thousand souls, most of the parishes are large in territory but small in the number of people served. Since our section of the country was settled only during the last century, the Church is relatively new, and does not enjoy a position of numerical or political strength. Indeed, studies of religious affiliation in our region indicate that at least half of the citizens have membership in no formal religious body, a sad situation to be sure, but one which offers great challenge to the apostolic zeal of a vigorous and dedicated Christian people. Evangelization of a largely unchurched segment of our fellow citizens must be the preoccupation and goal of the Church in Region XII. Each of the Bishops of Region XII has submitted his Quinquennial Report to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops. Taken together the Reports will show that there flourishes in the Northwest a Catholic people with deep faith, a people

fully aware of its responsibility to act as a leaven in a society which needs the Word of God and Christian witness to enrich the private and public lives of its citizens by the insertion and promotion of Gospel values, and to find effective ways to strengthen and support a Christian family life which is being assaulted on every side by the not-too-subtle viruses of secularism and materialism. The forty-five Bishops who are at the Casa Santa Maria following a program of studies in the Sacred Sciences under the sponsorship of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops of the United States and the North American College in Rome are serious about their role as leaders and teachers of God's people. Since August 29 they have spent many hours each day listening to and dialoguing with theologians and Scripture scholars of world renown in an earnest effort to develop a deeper and wider understanding of the Gospel message in the light of the documents of the Second Vatican Council and the official teachings of the Magisterium. These same Bishops, all of whom are guests of Your Holiness this morning, have just returned from a week's pilgrimage in the Holy Land, deepening their faith in the life, death and resurrection of Christ, as they retraced the footsteps of the God-Man, Jesus, from Bethlehem to Nazareth, and from the Sea of Galilee to Calvary. Two and one half weeks ago all of us were on the steps of St. Peter's, joined in unity with Bishops throughout the world, and with numerous pilgrims and citizens of Rome, as Your Holiness celebrated Mass with the members of the College of Cardinals, and were enthroned as the Bishop of Rome and the spiritual leader of 700 million Catholics. We thanked Almighty God for giving us a new Roman Pontiff in the person of the Cardinal Archbishop and Patriarch of Venice. Recognizing the divinely guided preparation Your Holiness has received for the high office to which you have been elected by your peers, we see in Your Holiness a Shepherd who will be "a man for all seasons", a pastoral Pontiff, who will lead the Church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit with the warmth and humanity of Pope John XXIII, and the wisdom and patience of Pope Paul VI of happy memory. Each of us has visited the burial place of your courageous predecessor. We loved Pope Paul as a brother and a father. We are delighted that Your Holiness has taken his name and that of Pope John. You are our hope; you are the Rock of Peter. We pledge you our prayers and our loyalty. May God bless Your Holiness in all your undertakings in behalf of the Church and of all mankind.