



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS
OF THE UNITED STATES
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Thursday, 9 November 1978

Dear Brothers in Our Lord Jesus Christ,

ONE OF THE GREATEST consolations of the new Pope is to know that he has the love and support of all the People of God. Like the Apostle Peter in the Acts of the Apostles, the Pope is powerfully sustained by the fervent prayers of the faithful. And so it is a special joy for me today to be with you, my Brothers in the Episcopate, the pastors of local Churches in the United States of America. I know that you bring with you the deep faith of your people, their profound respect for the mystery of Peter's role in God's design for the universal Church, and their love for Christ and his brethren. In the providence of God I have been able to visit your land and to know some of your people personally. Thus our being together is itself a celebration of the unity of the Church. It is also an attestation of our acceptance of Jesus Christ in the totality of his mystery of salvation.

As Servant and Pastor and Father of the universal Church, I wish at this moment to express my love for all those who are specially called to work for the Gospel, all those who actively collaborate with you in your Dioceses, to build up the Kingdom of God. Like yourselves, I learned as a Bishop to understand firsthand the ministry of priests, the problems affecting their lives, the splendid efforts they are making, the sacrifices that are an integral part of their service to God's people. Like yourselves, I am fully aware of how much Christ depends on his priests in order to fulfill in time his mission of redemption. And like yourselves I have worked with the Religious, endeavoring to give witness to the esteem that the Church has for them in their vocation of consecrated love, and urging them always to full generous collaboration in the corporate life of the ecclesial community. All of us have seen abundant examples of authentic evangelica testificatio. Now I ask you all to take my greetings to the clergy and Religious, to assure them all of my understanding, my solidarity, my love in Christ Jesus and in the Church.

I am aware also that my pastoral obligations extend to the whole community of the faithful. During this audience I would

like to offer a few basic reflections that I am firmly convinced are relevant for each local Church in its entirety. In establishing priorities, my predecessors Paul VI and John Paul I chose topics of extreme importance, and all of their exhortations and directives to the American Bishops I ratify with full knowledge and personal conviction. The very last address (and the only one given by my immediate predecessor) was on the Christian family. Already during the first weeks of my Pontificate I too have had occasion to speak on this theme, and to extol its importance. Yes, may all the wonderful Christian families in God's Church know that the Pope is with them, united in prayer, in hope, in confidence. The Pope confirms them in their mission given them by Christ himself, proclaims their dignity, and blesses all their efforts.

I am thoroughly convinced that families everywhere and the great family of the Catholic Church will be greatly served – a real pastoral service will be rendered to them – if a renewed emphasis is placed on the role of doctrine in the life of the Church. In God's plan a new Pontificate is always a new beginning, evoking fresh hopes and giving new opportunities for reflection, for conversion, for prayer and for resolves.

Under the care of Mary, Mother of God and Mother of the Church, I wish to commit my Pontificate to the continued genuine application of the Second Vatican Council, under the action of the Holy Spirit. And in this regard, nothing is more enlightening than to recall the exact words with which, on the opening day, John XXIII wished to spell out the orientation of this great ecclesial event: "The greatest concern of the Ecumenical Council is this: that the sacred deposit of Christian doctrine should be more effectively guarded and taught". This farseeing vision of Pope John is valid today. It was the only sound basis for an Ecumenical Council aimed at pastoral renewal; it is the only sound basis for all our pastoral endeavors as Bishops of the Church of God. This then is my own deepest hope today for the pastors of the Church in America, as well as for all the pastors of the universal Church: " that the sacred deposit of Christian doctrine should be more effectively guarded and taught". The sacred deposit of God's word, handed on by the Church, is the joy and strength of our people's lives. It is the only pastoral solution to the many problems of our day. To present this sacred deposit of Christian doctrine in all its purity and integrity, with all its exigencies and in all its power is a holy pastoral responsibility; it is, moreover, the most sublime service we can render.

And the second hope that I would express today is a hope for the preservation of the great discipline of the Church – a hope eloquently formulated by John Paul I on the day after his election: "We wish to maintain intact the great discipline of the Church in the life of priests and of the faithful, as the history of the Church, enriched by experience has presented it throughout the centuries, with examples of holiness and heroic perfection, both in the exercise of the evangelical virtues and in service to the poor, the humble, the defenseless".

These two hopes do not exhaust our aspirations or our prayers, but they are worthy of intense pastoral efforts and apostolic diligence. These efforts and diligence on our part are in turn an expression of real love and concern for the flock entrusted to our care by Jesus Christ the chief Shepherd – a pastoral charge to be exercised within the unity of the universal Church and in the context of the collegiality of the Episcopate.

These hopes for the life of the Church – purity of doctrine and sound discipline – intimately depend on every new generation of priests, who with the generosity of love continue the Church's commitment to the Gospel. For this reason, Paul VI showed great wisdom in asking the American Bishops " to fulfill with loving personal attention your great pastoral

responsibility to your seminarians: know the content of their courses, encourage them to love the word of God and never to be ashamed of the seeming folly of the Cross". And this is my ardent desire today that a new emphasis on the importance of doctrine and discipline will be the postconciliar contribution of your seminaries, so that "the word of the Lord may speed on and triumph".

And in all your pastoral labors you can be sure that the Pope is united with you and close to you in the love of Jesus Christ. All of us have a single goal: to prove faithful to the pastoral trust committed to us, to lead the People of God "in right paths for his name's sake", so that, with pastoral accountability, we can say with Jesus to the Father: "As long as I was with them, I guarded them with your name which you gave me. I kept careful watch, and not one of them was lost...".

In the name of Jesus, peace to you and to all your people. With my Apostolic Blessing.