



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS OF THE ANTILLES
ON THEIR «AD LIMINA» VISIT**

Saturday, 27 October 1984

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

1. In you and through you I greet all those who make up the Church *in the vast area of the Caribbean*, in which you are called by God to exercise the pastoral ministry: "Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Saviour" (*Tit.* 1, 4).

Our gathering together today is an expression of the great reality of *Catholic unity* in the ecclesiastical province of Port-of-Spain, Kingston, Castries and Fort-de-France. This catholic unity is a characteristic of the universal Church and, at the same time, is truly lived in all the local Churches that you represent. Your presence here is a beautiful witness to the one Church made up of "every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (*Apoc.* 5, 9). Through this Catholic unity you likewise bear witness to the brotherhood of peoples, showing that their destinies are so closely linked, one to another. And as you exemplify the great value of fraternal solidarity, you show the effectiveness of close collaboration for the sake of the Gospel of Christ.

2. Since the last *ad Limina* Visit of the Bishops of the Antilles, in May 1979, *many changes* have taken place in your lives and in the lives of your people. Five of you have been *named to the Episcopacy* and have been ordained Bishops. Four new States have *acceded to independence*: Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Belize, Antigua and Barbuda and Saint Kitts-Nevis. In addition *to diplomatic relations* already existing between the Holy See and the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, Grenada, and Barbados, diplomatic relations have also been established between the Holy See and five other nations: Jamaica, the Commonwealth of the Bahamas, the Commonwealth of Dominica, Belize and Saint-Lucia. In addition the Ecclesiastical Province of Fort-de-France has been *incorporated into the area of the Antilles Episcopal Conference*. Last

year I was pleased to be able to make a short visit to Belize, as I had previously done *to the Bahamas*, and as I hope to do early next year *to Port-of-Spain*. I also hope with God's help to be in a position later on to accept the other invitations that have been extended to me.

I mention these considerations and events in order to assure you once again that I share with you *all your pastoral cares*, and that I am close to you in your zealous service to your people. Indeed, I wish to express to you my sentiments of fraternal love and support in Christ. I want you and your priests to know of my gratitude "for your partnership in the Gospel" (*Phil. 1, 3*). I thank you for all your efforts to lead your people to the fullness of their Christian vocation in holiness of life.

3. We ourselves at this moment are *celebrating the unity of the Church* in our own profound hierarchical communion. It is my prayer that this celebration will strengthen you in your important mission of presenting the Church in the Antilles as "a sign and instrument of intimate union with God and of the unity of the whole human race" (*Lumen Gentium, 1*). As Bishops living, in faith and love, the mystery of the Church's unity and reflecting together on its meaning, we receive the power to proclaim it, preserve it, reinforce it. And the unity in question is a unity modelled on the unity of the Most Holy Trinity, a unity to be lived by all the People of God.

4. I am grateful to you for all your initiatives in proclaiming an uplifting *Christian vision of the human person*, created in God's image and destined to share fully in the unity of the Most Holy Trinity. I support you as you insist on human dignity, on respect for human lives and human rights, on the need for liberation from everything that impedes or offends man's relationship with God. It is indeed *the task of the pastor* to hold up before each individual the fullness of his or her dignity in Christ, the dignity of being a child of God, an heir of heaven, the need to live according to God's plan and to share in the sacramental life of the Church.

In your zealous efforts to further justice and peace and true freedom and development as they affect the Caribbean, you have great support from the Holy See and your brother Bishops throughout the world. The Second Vatican Council has summoned the whole Church to proclaim and live *the requirements of Christ's Gospel of love*.

5. It is encouraging to note how the Holy Spirit is ever active in the young people, and how he does not abandon the Church. For some of your local Churches the grace of God has recently supplied and increased number of *vocations to the priesthood* and for this, as pastors, we must be deeply grateful. It is the great responsibility of the Bishops to ensure the best possible training for these young men. *The seminary programmes*, for years to come, will influence the whole life and progress of the Church in the Caribbean. The Holy See has a special interest and concern in the worldwide formation of seminarians precisely because so much is at stake. There are many aspects to preparation for the priesthood, but none is more important than a *true formation in the world of God* as proclaimed by the Church and interpreted by her Magisterium.

6. In the spheres of your pastoral endeavours you are in a position, week after week, year after year, to bear witness to the importance that the Church attaches to *ecumenism*. The commitment of the Second Vatican Council is irrevocable because it corresponds to the will of God and the prayer of Christ. In this matter, the value of prayer and the need for conversion and purification have been repeatedly emphasized, and it must always be so. The challenge of ecumenism is a *call to holiness*. And because it requires fidelity to God's plan for his Church, there can be no unity without truth and charity. In the long striving for perfect unity, *fraternal and sincere collaboration in the cause of the Gospel* remains an indispensable mark of true discipleship.

7. At this point in the evangelization of your people, I know how much you rely on the Catholic laity and how much hope you have placed in them. Your own aspirations correspond fully to those of the whole Church and are mirrored in her desire that the next Synod of Bishops should be devoted to *the vocation and mission of the laity*.

As the laity continue to be formed by the word of God and nurtured by Christ's sacraments they will be in a position to be ever more effective in their own tasks of evangelizing the world and of permeating the temporal order with the spirit of the Gospel. In order, however, that the laity may properly fulfil their vocation, *the role of the clergy* is extremely important. And it is only a well formed laity, in their turn, who can give the gift of priestly and religious vocations to the Church.

8. I wish to offer you a word of special encouragement all your *apostolic activities on behalf of the family*. In proclaiming God's plan for the family you have likewise striven to help the faithful reach the goal that God has set for them. Be assured that all your efforts to exalt human love and to defend human life are a great service to all humanity. Programmes to help young people prepare for marriage are worthy of much praise, as are initiatives aimed at promoting Natural Family Planning. In discovering the rightful connection between the unitive and procreative aspects of human love, numerous couples will simultaneously discover greater happiness and fulfilment in God's plan. The good of the family in the Caribbean is truly worthy of all your pastoral energy.

9. At the centre of the Christian community is *the celebration of the Sacred Liturgy* and in particular the Eucharistic Sacrifice. Human and Christian fulfilment absolutely requires the worship of God, communion with him and the experience of his love. *The importance of Sunday Mass* for the vitality of a local Church cannot be overemphasized. In this regard I would like to recall the words that I spoke at your last *ad Limina* Visit: "I ask you to remind your faithful of the real privilege that is theirs to assemble for Sunday Mass, to be united with Christ in his worship of the Father. Sunday Mass is indeed of primary value in the life of the faithful, not in the sense that their other activities lack importance and meaning in Christian living, but rather in the sense that Sunday Mass sustains, enobles and sanctifies all that they do throughout the week".

10. Vénérables Frères dans l'épiscopat, bien des fois j'ai eu à coeur d'exprimer *l'estime de l'Eglise pour la vie religieuse*, son amour pour les hommes et les femmes consacrés, prêtres, religieux et

religieuses. Je sais ce qu'ils représentent pour vous et pour l'évangélisation dans vos diocèses. Avec vous, je les remercie pour ce qu'ils sont et pour ce qu'ils font en faveur du royaume de Dieu. Et je leur demande de continuer à témoigner de l'amour du Christ par leur fidélité aux conseils évangéliques, par leur généreuse consécration à Jésus Christ. D'une manière particulière, je me tourne vers ceux et celles qui se dévouent aux tâches de l'éducation, les encourageant à continuer d'aider les jeunes à découvrir le Christ et à en vivre, afin d'assurer l'évangélisation des générations à venir.

11. Chers Frères, en considérant avec vous la vie ecclésiale de vos communautés locales, nous ne pouvons pas ne pas voir les problèmes et les défis, les joies et les espérances qu'elles portent. Mais en même temps, nous ne pouvons pas ne pas *nous unir dans un grand acte de foi en la grâce de Dieu*, en la puissance du mystère pascal, et dans les mérites infinis de Jésus Christ.

C'est lui, Jésus Christ, le Bon Pasteur, le Fils de Dieu, le Verbe éternel fait chair, c'est lui qui guide son Eglise, qui pourvoit à ses besoins, qui soutient sa foi et la conduit à la vie éternelle. Le grand privilège de l'épiscopat *est d'avoir part à la mission pastorale de l'Unique "Chef des pasteurs"* de l'Eglise (1 Petr. 5, 4). C'est en son nom que nous proclamons l'Evangile du salut et que nous construisons l'Eglise. Notre confiance est en lui seul et en son pouvoir.

Remettons cette activité d'importance vitale, ce ministère pastoral qui est le nôtre, entre les mains de Marie, Mère de notre Seigneur Jésus Christ et Mère de son Eglise.

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