



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE LATIN-RITE BISHOPS OF UKRAINE
ON THEIR AD LIMINA VISIT**

Thursday, 25 March 1999

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,

1. I cordially welcome you all on the occasion of your first visit *ad limina Apostolorum* as Pastors of the Latin-rite Catholic community of Ukraine, and I greet you with the words of the Apostle: "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph 1:2). At the end of a century that has seen the Dioceses entrusted to you beset by painful events, Providence has at last let the dew of a consoling rebirth fall on your communities. Blessed be God, who in his goodness has allowed you to see the fundamental value of freedom return to your beloved land before the end of the millennium, enabling you to devote all your energies to the service of a promising harvest.

In the history of your Episcopal Conference, this is the first formal meeting with the Successor of Peter and the Roman Curia in the context of the traditional contact of the *ad limina* visit. I thank Archbishop Marian Jaworski, President of the Episcopal Conference, for his words of faith and communion on behalf of you all. I assure each of you of my constant prayer for the intense ministry you carry out at the service of the Churches entrusted to your pastoral care.

Looking at the difficult legacy of the recent past, how can we not admire the wonders the Lord has wrought in the past eight years through the sacrifice, dedication and pastoral zeal of you Bishops, and of the priests, religious and numerous lay people who, at your side and under your guidance, have supported the rebirth of your Dioceses? The witness of so many heroes of faith who suffered persecution, and the courage of the many parents who tenaciously conveyed their love of the Gospel to their children, have not been in vain. This is proven by the providential revival of your communities.

2. In a relatively short time, thanks of course to the solidarity of your Sister Dioceses, you have been able to rebuild a Church which had been reduced to ruins. Realizing what the conditions

once were and looking at today's reality, our hearts feel the spontaneous need to give glory to God for what he has done. At the same time, we must give credit to the many priests, religious and lay people who made themselves valuable instruments in the plan of salvation.

Continue on this path, following the example of Olha, Volodymyr and Iziaslav- Dmytro, who received Baptism on the banks of the Dnipro. Always be motivated by deep apostolic and missionary zeal. May your communities be alive and fervent, united with their Pastors and committed to evangelization. In this way, you will be able to look to the future with trust, to fulfil your mission with increasing effectiveness in the beloved land of Ukraine. The areas of pastoral activity are broad, and you have already begun useful initiatives for an enrichment of the faith and for a more incisive Gospel witness in society.

3. In overcoming many difficulties, your main concern in these years has been to provide your communities with operative structures and indispensable sacred buildings for gatherings of the faithful and for liturgical celebrations. Many parish churches and chapels have been reopened for worship, while three seminaries are currently functioning along with a catechetical institute.

Now you have turned your attention to the demands of the new evangelization, in order to support the faithful in deepening their faith and to offer the life-giving word of the Gospel to the younger generation. To this end, catechesis adapted to the needs of our time is indispensable. Continuing what the Second Vatican Council began, I encourage you to begin that sound renewal of methods which, while leaving the substance of Christ's message unchanged, will adapt its presentation to the sensitivities of the new times. For this reason, the recently published *Catechism of the Catholic Church* will be a great help to you.

Every baptized person, and truly every person of goodwill, has the right to receive from the Church an education and formation that will enable him to attain real knowledge of Christ. By giving catechesis priority over other perhaps more spectacular projects, the Ecclesial Community will find an authentic way to strengthen its own internal life for an effective approach to the outside world (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi tradendae*, n. 15). A thorough catechetical programme is a proper response to the challenges of our times, including the troubling phenomenon of the proliferation of sects.

The gradual increase in the number of local diocesan and religious clergy, theologically and pastorally trained by teachers formed in the various sacred disciplines, will enable you to improve the organization of pastoral ministry and to develop evangelization and catechesis, especially for young people and families. Moreover, how can we not see how vitally important to this process is the contribution of consecrated and lay persons who are willing and well-trained in knowledge of the Christian message?

4. This introduces the subject of the need to reinforce the pastoral care of vocations, especially

vocations to the priesthood and the religious life. Seminaries, and in general the various formation structures for sacred ministry or consecrated life, are the "apple of the Bishop's eye". He must give these institutions the best of the community's resources, since the vocational dimension is connatural and essential to the Church's life.

Every vocation is a gift of God, who "chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ" (Eph 1:4-5). The Church herself, by her very constitution, is a "vocation", and generates and educates vocations meant to foster the growth of God's kingdom in the world (cf. *Apostolicam actuositatem*, n. 3). From here arises the natural need to sensitize Christians, so that they will generously devote all spiritual and material means to the service of vocations. Holy priests and consecrated persons are essential for the vast field of evangelization.

Next, the families' role is indispensable. Indeed, the more that Christian families and ecclesial communities are grounded in Gospel values, the more diligent in prayer and sacramental life, the more open to the Lord's call and the stronger in sacrifice and in giving of themselves unconditionally, the better they will sense the urgent need to offer concrete support to those whom God invites to have a special bond with him and a particular service in the Church (cf. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores dabo vobis*, n. 41).

5. As time passes, this natural growth process will reveal ever more clearly the "catholic" identity of your Churches at the service of all, while respecting the religious and national identity of the various ethnic groups in your country, but without losing their own distinctive features!

In your land you show the wealth of the Catholic Church in the variety of her ritual expressions: the Byzantine and Latin traditions, with the contribution, although numerically small, of the Armenians, blend in the one hymn of praise which the pilgrim Bride on earth sings to her heavenly Bridegroom. Moreover, this plurality in unity is the Church's boast: while it is a particular feature of the Christian community, it is also an ideal reference-point for human society, which too is called to build communion while respecting and attending to all its various cultural elements. If respect for each one's identity is required by justice, it is even more a demand of love, which is the supreme law for the Christian.

May the particular religious situation in your country, which is far from easy, not discourage you from constantly seeking ways of dialogue, mutual understanding and, whenever possible and appropriate, sound forms of collaboration. You will be helped by an attentive and courageous missionary zeal that seeks to pull down the barriers created by the distressing oppression of 70 years of militant atheism. How many of your fellow citizens hunger and thirst for God! You must help them rediscover their Christian roots by approaching them as true apostles, so that no one will deceive them with empty philosophies or vain pretenses (cf. Col 2:8).

6. Take special care of the younger generation. May the search for dialogue guide your every step. Every effort must be made, at all levels and in all the tasks of ecclesial life, to show by action how diversity is called to blend in the harmony of unity. Nor can there be any genuine ecumenical witness except by showing in practice how the Catholic Church knows how to find within herself the strength and consistency of a united commitment. For this to happen, your primary commitment must be to mutual knowledge and harmony, by making the most of every practical opportunity to meet, so that Pastors may be a model of openness and good will for all their flock.

Only the Lord knows the pace and times of this journey. But it is up to us to pray fervently and to have a firm desire to meet. In fact, the Spirit is profoundly challenging the Catholic faithful and, while he urges them to enter into what might be called a "dialogue of conversion", he opens them to "fraternal relations which will be something more than mere cordial understanding or external sociability. The bonds of fraternal koinonia must be forged before God and in Christ Jesus" (Encyclical Letter *Ut unum sint*, n. 82).

7. Venerable Brothers, "ecumenism is not only an internal question of the Christian communities. It is a matter of the love which God has in Jesus Christ for all humanity; to stand in the way of this love is an offence against him and against his plan to gather all people in Christ" (Encyclical Letter *Ut unum sint*, n. 99).

This is a dimension of ecumenism which appears particularly timely if we are aware of how necessary the preaching and witness of Christ's followers is in the context of Ukrainian society! It is needed by families, whose unity and respect for life are so fragile; it is needed by the weakest, especially children who are often abandoned; it is required of society, which strives to pursue a common good that will shun the privileges of the few and the marginalization of the weakest; it is sought by young people who want new hopes and concrete ideals to which they can commit their lives. How can we not see your pastoral work as an essential contribution to the construction and growth of all Ukrainian society? As for the Catholic Church, ecumenical commitment is one of the priorities she cannot and will not abandon.

In this task, your diocesan communities should not feel alone or unequal to facing the challenges before them. May the spirit of communion that closely unites the particular Churches throughout the world allow you to feel the effective comfort of fraternal love. I urge the ecclesial communities of the West not to fail in their duty of sharing service programmes with you wherever possible, thereby helping you to achieve all that your Dioceses are undertaking for their people. Moreover, I am sure that your brothers and sisters in the West will not adopt attitudes, in areas of joint presence, which could appear disrespectful of the exhausting efforts you are making, efforts which are all the more to your credit, given the precariousness of the resources you have available (cf. Apost. Let. *Oriente lumen*, n. 23)

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate, as I offer with you a hymn of praise to God who chose us before

the world's creation to be holy and blameless in love before him (cf. Eph 1:4), I express my heartfelt wish that the celebration of the forthcoming Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, to which we are all journeying, will be an occasion of renewed enthusiasm for conversion and commitment for every Christian who lives in your country. May it also be the source of a deep and generous commitment to fraternal cooperation among all the Churches in Ukraine, so that the day will soon come when the disciples of the divine Teacher can bear witness in full communion to the One who was, who is and who is to come.

With these wishes, as I call upon the prayerful Lady of Volodymyr, who "continually accompanied the pilgrimage of faith of the peoples of ancient Rus" (Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Mater*, n. 33), so that your Churches may obtain a new outpouring of grace, I cordially impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you, your priests, the consecrated persons and all the faithful entrusted to your care.