



The Holy See

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

Thursday, 26 April 2001

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate!

1. I welcome you with great affection on the occasion of your visit *ad limina Apostolorum*. You have come to bear witness to the communion of faith that links the Church in the Republic of Slovenia to the Successor of Peter, the Head of the Episcopal College. In this circumstance, I make my own the words of the Apostle Paul to the Philippians: "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, thankful for your partnership in the Gospel" (1: 3-5).

I am grateful to Metropolitan Archbishop Franc Rodé of Ljubljana for his cordial words to me as President of the Slovenian Episcopal Conference, in his own name and on behalf of you all.

From the reports on your Dioceses and, in particular, from the fraternal talks I was able to have with you on the current situation of the Church in your country, her apostolic commitment and the prospects and difficulties she encounters in the activity of evangelization, I noted with joy the great pastoral zeal that enlivens you and your priests. Continue on the way of fidelity to the mandate received from Christ, doing your utmost to fulfil your daily task for the cause of the Gospel.

2. A vast field of evangelizing action is opening before you, Pastors of the Church in Slovenia. In order to respond better to the expectations and needs of your diocesan communities and of all civil society, you desired to celebrate the *First Slovenian Plenary Council*, to which the country's priests, religious and lay faithful have contributed (cf. *Documento finale*, p. 8). I urge you to refer constantly to the indications which emerged from that providential meeting, continuing to watch "[over] all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you guardians" (Acts 20: 28). In governing

the People of God, in acts of worship and in teaching the doctrine passed on by the Apostles, you know that you must always and in all things be "examples to the flock" (cf. 1 Pt 5: 3).

In this respect you have shining examples of Pastors who spent all their energy in tireless service to the brethren. Here I would like to recall in particular Bl. Anton Martin Slomsek and the Servants of God Bishop Friderik Baraga and Bishop Anton Vovk. May their teachings inspire you and their intercession accompany you.

In the new social scenario that is emerging in your country, have at heart the fostering of the common good of society as well as the proclamation of the Gospel, so as to encourage the spiritual and material progress of all people and every individual person. Working for the genuine growth of the country's men and women is part of the Church's mission: indeed, no genuinely human dimension, from the social, cultural and political to the economic and scientific, and those of social assistance, health-care and sports, is "foreign" to the Gospel.

In carrying out your specific mission at the service of humanity, the Church encounters the State in various areas and this opens prospects of fruitful and mutual collaboration, with full respect for one another's legitimate autonomy.

3. In meeting today, unforgettable memories spring to my mind of the two pastoral visits I was able to make to your country, from 17 to 20 May 1996 and on 19 September 1999. I still have the imprint in my heart of the emotion I felt from the warm welcome given to me by the country's authorities, the Christian community and the entire people. I likewise have vivid memories of other meetings that I had with the faithful of Slovenia on various occasions here in Rome, especially on the occasion of the national Jubilee pilgrimage. Every time I could see the enthusiasm and zeal of Slovenian Catholics and note your people's rich spiritual and cultural heritage.

On the threshold of the third millennium, while the urgent need for "an exciting work of pastoral revitalization" (*Novo millennio ineunte*, n. 29) is also making itself intensely felt in Slovenia, may you make this legacy the starting point for a prophetic renewal of the proclamation of the Gospel.

As it has been in the past, this will certainly be to the benefit of the whole nation and will help it remain faithful to true religious and human values, overcoming the old and new challenges it encounters on its way through daily life.

4. As I speak to you, Pastors of the Church in Slovenia, and with you look confidently at the vast apostolic field that awaits you, my thoughts turn to the priests who are your first and principal co-workers in your service to the People of God; I am thinking of the deacons and the other pastoral workers, as well as of the religious and the lay faithful, actively involved in the life and mission of the Christian community; lastly I am thinking of those who have left their homeland to bring the Gospel proclamation to mission lands. To each one I express my sincere appreciation for his

generous apostolic commitment. I encourage them to persevere in the task entrusted to them with prompt dedication and humble charity, keeping themselves in full conformity with their Pastors and with one another, so that the ministry of each one will serve in building Christ's mystical Body and for the good of civil society (cf. *CCC*, n. 799).

As for you, venerable Brothers in the Episcopate, your specific mission remains that of testing all things and holding fast to what is good, fostering the Spirit's action (cf. *Lumen gentium*, n. 12) in full communion with the Successor of Peter, the heir of "a sure charism of truth" (St Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses*, IV, 26, 2: *PG* 7, 10, 53). Indeed you are primarily responsible for pastoral work in each of your Dioceses.

Harmony of apostolic intentions and close cooperation among all - priests, consecrated men and women and lay faithful, under the Bishop's attentive guidance - will bear abundant fruits of faith, charity and holiness. To this end, dear brothers, foster communion with one another; join forces at the parish, diocesan and national levels in order to respond appropriately to modern pastoral needs. In this way you will be able to create, with attentive Gospel love, adequate structures for the current needs, ensuring that no one remains excluded from your concern as Pastors. Do so with apostolic daring and courage.

5. In our times people are attracted by witnesses rather than by teachers, as one of your proverbs stresses: "Words entice, examples draw". This is why it is important that all who intend to dedicate themselves to the apostolate should be exemplary in holiness, teaching and wisdom. Their lives and work must reflect the living image of Christ in every situation.

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate, this demands a constant theological, liturgical and pastoral formation which you will never tire of assuring your communities. It is a duty that concerns not only priests, but also other pastoral workers, consecrated people and the lay faithful. Act therefore in such a way that priests and all who are dedicated to pastoral work do not lack opportunities for updating, especially on those topics that prove particularly useful in performing your daily duties. At the same time, the lay faithful, young people and adults, should be offered appropriate opportunities to deepen their faith, in order to live the Gospel more consistently, at the individual in addition to the family and communitarian levels.

Dedicate yourselves, therefore, with great care to the human and spiritual formation of future priests. Seminaries should be true Upper Rooms where candidates are given the opportunity for a true and integral maturation. At the same time, make sure that the lay faithful are active in carrying out their mission in the social, political, economic and cultural life of the country, as heralds of Christ and of the prophetic power of his Gospel.

You therefore need to have at your disposal a pastoral programme that reinitiates the evangelization of families and young people; a far-reaching catechesis that involves the members

of every social class, men and women of every age, helping them to discover and to live the mystery of Christ and of salvation that is celebrated in the liturgy.

6. An intense and consistent witness is the premise and promise of a renewed enthusiasm in evangelization. In this perspective it will be especially important to promote untiringly new vocations to the priesthood, to the consecrated life and to other forms of total self-giving to the Lord. The commitment to keeping alive the missionary spirit which has always distinguished the Church in Slovenia is equally fundamental. May God awaken in the new generations a great many young people who are willing to become stewards of the Mysteries of salvation, entrusted by Christ to his Church. May he also inspire generous people to follow Christ on the way of Gospel perfection with a free and undivided heart.

If they are able to open themselves to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, your Ecclesial Communities will be leaven in society and will spread everywhere the Good News of the risen Lord, offering in their own lives a convincing witness of his saving power. May Christ Jesus, our hope (cf. 1 Tm 1: 1), Lord of history and Pastor of the Church, fill you and your Churches with his grace and peace.

I entrust these wishes to the Virgin of Nazareth, the humble handmaid of the Lord. May Mary watch over her devoted children of beloved Slovenia from her shrine in Brezje and support them with her intercession in their efforts to build the present and the future in harmony with God's plan for man and for human society.

With these wishes, I cordially impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you, venerable and dear Brothers, to the priests, deacons, consecrated men and women, lay faithful and the entire people of your beloved country.