



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
TO THE BISHOPS OF HUNGARY
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Tuesday, 30 January 2001

*Your Eminence,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate!*

1. May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with each and every one of you! I am pleased to be able to receive you on the occasion of your *ad limina* visit. The pilgrimage to the tomb of the Prince of the Apostles is a significant moment in every Pastor's life: it offers him the opportunity to express his communion with the Successor of Peter and to share with him the concerns and hopes connected with the episcopal ministry.

Your visit is framed by two great events: the recent closing of the Holy Door of the Great Jubilee and, in your homeland, the celebrations under way for the 1,000 years since your nation became Christian. These events have already given me the opportunity to greet you, both through my Cardinal Secretary of State, who represented me on the occasion of the feast of St Stephen, and personally a few months ago, when you came to St Peter's tomb with your country's national pilgrimage.

2. Those who would like to face the future successfully must return to their roots. The Jubilee celebrations here in Rome, as in your country, concentrated on the historical event which gave rise to Christianity. The Great Jubilee has invited us to turn our gaze to the moment when the Word of God took our human nature and was born in time, he who is the same yesterday, today and for ever (cf. *Heb 13: 8*). It is my deep desire that our gaze remains set on the one Redeemer of man, as I pointed out in my recent Apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte*. In this document I offered a demanding programme for the future, presenting certain guidelines which I consider important, if we are not to lose sight of the Saviour's face and to put the Gospel message into

practice.

The first task of the Church's Pastors is to proclaim the truths of the faith, which culminate in the Incarnation and in the Paschal Mystery. Our message draws its strength from contemplation of the face of Christ, the God-Man, who died and rose for us. Only because the Son of God truly became man can we men and women, in him and through him, truly become children of God. Your emphasis on the contemplation of Christ will be a clear sign of your desire to give your mission a spiritual and pastoral mark that will not fail to influence the lifestyle of those entrusted to you.

3. In this context I express my appreciation of your efforts to encourage in the clergy, religious and lay faithful of your local Churches a genuine spirituality that will enable them to face their various pastoral challenges with new enthusiasm prompted by their Jubilee experiences. In this regard, I would like once again to recall the programme I outlined in the Apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte*: in it I mentioned certain demanding Gospel imperatives. Having our gaze set on Christ, who came so that we might have life and have it abundantly (cf. *Jn* 10: 10), requires us to accept every aspect of his gift, starting with the physical. On the threshold of the third millennium, we are more aware than ever of the need to defend and nurture life. A real "culture of life" must be fostered in our world.

I know how energetically committed you are to defending life. Despite your tireless dedication, however, the worrying data indicating the spread of a more and more disturbing culture of death in many countries of the old continent can also be noted in your homeland. The statistics published on abortion in your country in recent decades are alarming. They must spur you to defend human life fearlessly and clearly at every phase of its existence from conception to natural death. Do everything possible to encourage expectant mothers to carry their pregnancy to term.

In these critical times the Church has an important role. Christians must become more and more what they are called to be: the salt of the earth and the light of the world (cf. *Mt* 5: 13-14). This noble vocation especially obliges Pastors who, as we read in the Second Letter to Timothy, must be ready to preach the word on every occasion, in season and out of season (cf. *2 Tm* 4: 2). Be involved wherever you think you should defend God and man! Do not be of the world, but do not separate yourselves from the world (cf. *Jn* 15: 19). A secular society in which there is less and less talk of God needs your voice. To give society a soul, it may be helpful to ally yourselves with the Pastors and Christians of other Churches and Ecclesial Communities. The ecumenism of witness, in fact, opens a broad area for cooperation.

4. The current conditions of the Church in Hungary must not be identified merely as an agnostic context of religious indifference. God is present, even if he is excluded or never mentioned. Of course, many live as though God did not exist. But the desire for him is always alive in hearts. For man is not satisfied only with what is human, but seeks a truth that transcends him because he senses, if confusedly, that in this truth lies the meaning of his life. The answer to the question of

life's meaning is a great opportunity for the Church. Let us open our doors, then, to all who are sincerely searching for God! Those who ask the Church for truth have the right to expect that she will offer them the written or transmitted word of God authentically and integrally (cf. *Dei Verbum*, n. 10).

The search for truth is thus protected from the risks of a vague, irrational or syncretistic piety, and God's living Church is revealed for what she is: "the pillar and bulwark of the truth" (1 *Tm* 3: 15).

5. The Church in your country has endured various kinds of persecution: violent, and other more sophisticated and subtle forms. In the past 10 years, the Church has experienced a different reality: the "turning-point" has led not only to new freedom, but also to "consumer shock". Material goods are emphasized with such insistence that any desire for religious and moral values is often stifled. But as time passes, if the soul is not nourished and only hands are filled, man experiences emptiness: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (*Mt* 4: 4; cf. *Dt* 8: 3).

In this connection I would like to express my concern about the significance of Sunday, which is in ever greater risk of losing all meaning. In the Apostolic Letter *Dies Domini* I described Sunday as the Lord's day and man's day. I would like to repeat a thought which is close to my heart: man, as a person, must not be overwhelmed by economic interests. This is a real risk, because "the consumer society", where God is often considered dead, has created an abundance of idols, prominent among which is the idol of profit at any cost. During the Great Jubilee a different side of these societies was also revealed: many people have rediscovered the reserves of Christianity, the Church's reserves, that is, the faith witnessed to and lived by many believers. Despite appearances that might give the opposite impression, Christian faith is deeply rooted in your people's hearts. It is up to you to reawaken God's voice in human consciences.

6. The truth of faith must be matched with consistency of life. The Church in Hungary, poor in material possessions, has priceless spiritual treasures, represented by the examples of faith and holiness of so many of her members. I am thinking in particular of Christian families, true "domestic churches". To face the challenges of modern society, we need to renew our pastoral ministry to families. I previously entrusted this wish to you in the Message I sent you for the feast of St Stephen in the unforgettable Year 2000. "Be conscious of the centrality of the family for a well-ordered, flourishing society" (n. 4). I am pleased that you gave the family a privileged place in the hierarchy of pastoral priorities by writing a joint *Pastoral Letter on the Family*. I appreciate this concerted action and hope that others will follow.

The work of evangelization in your country is in fact so immense that it requires all your forces and energies. There are the traditional "pulpits" such as preaching, catechesis, spiritual retreats and pastoral letters. But at the same time important new "aeropagi" await you: radio, television and new technologies. It is difficult to use and to "evangelize" these new means, but with imagination

and courage it can be done! I congratulate you on your efforts to establish a Catholic radio station. Such an institution, if it is used and managed well, can become a kind of pulpit from which you Pastors will be able to reach even the people who have left the Church.

7. Dear Brothers, if all Christians are called to be conformed to Christ, even more so are Bishops, who must be a model for their flocks. May Christ always be at the centre of your life. I am pleased with the motto you have chosen for your Hungarian millennium: "Our past is our hope - Christ is our future". Christ will be your future if you continue to contemplate his face; if you seek to live the Church more and more as communion; if you commit yourselves to an authentic and exciting vocations apostolate to deal with the shortage of priests and religious; if you help the lay faithful to discover and live ever more deeply their own vocation, on which the Second Vatican Council was so insistent.

The pupil of your pastoral eye must be young people. In this regard, you have taken an important step forward in the past five years by refounding many Catholic schools and establishing a Catholic university. These institutions are a sort of "workshop" in which students have the opportunity to prepare themselves for a Christian life worthy of human freedom and based on truth. Those who follow the voice of conscience need an authentic conscience in conformity with the truths taught by the Magisterium.

8. I wanted to encourage you with these thoughts, dear Brothers, in the pastoral tasks entrusted to you at the service of the Church in your homeland. Aware of your great dedication in carrying out your episcopal ministry, I would like to express to you my fraternal and grateful appreciation. In every situation may you be strengthened by the thought that Jesus Christ did not take you into his service as mere "managers", but consecrated you as stewards of his Mysteries, calling you to share in his friendship (cf. *Jn* 15: 14-15).

Lastly, I entrust your life and your mission as Pastors of your flocks to the intercession of Mary, *Magna Domina Hungarorum*. May an abundance of heavenly graces come upon you and on the priests, deacons, religious and lay people of your Dioceses, in pledge of which I cordially impart to you my Apostolic Blessing.