



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS
TO THE BISHOPS OF THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

*Feast of Saints Cyril and Methodius
Friday, 14 February 2014*

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

I welcome you on the occasion of your visit *ad limina Apostolorum*, with which you have renewed and strengthened the communion of the Church in the Czech Republic with the See of Peter. The meetings and cordial discussions over these days, in which you have shared with me and my collaborators in the Roman Curia, the joys and hopes, as well as the difficulties and anxieties of the Communities entrusted to your care, have been for me an occasion to become better acquainted with the state of the Church in your regions. You are rightly proud of the strong Christian roots of your people, whose faith dates back to the evangelization of Sts Cyril and Methodius; at the same time you are aware that adherence to Christ is not just the consequence of a certainly important past, it is a personal and ecclesial act that involves every person and community in today's history. In order to foster in the faithful a correct understanding of Jesus Christ and personal encounter with Him, you are called first and foremost to multiply appropriate pastoral initiatives aimed at a solid preparation for the Sacraments and an active participation in the liturgy. Furthermore, commitment to religious education and a qualified presence in the world of education and culture is necessary. There can be no lack on your part of vigilant and courageous openness to the new impulses of the Holy Spirit, who distributes his charisms and renders the lay faithful ready to take up responsibilities and ministries, which is useful for the renewal and growth of the Church. In order to confront today's challenges and new pastoral urgencies, synergy among the clergy, religious and the faithful is necessary. Every person in their own role is called to make a generous contribution so that the Good News may be proclaimed in every environment, even the most hostile or distant from the Church; so that the proclamation reach the outskirts, the various categories of people especially the weakest and those without

hope. From my heart I wish, trusting in the Lord's words who promised to be with us always (cf. Mt 28:20), that you may continue to walk with your people on the path of joyous adhesion to the Gospel. Although the Church in your country was oppressed for a long time by regimes founded on ideologies contrary to human dignity and freedom, today you are faced with other pitfalls, such as secularism and relativism. Thus, it is necessary to dialogue constructively with all people, even those who are far away from every religious sympathy, while proclaiming the values of the Gospel tirelessly. May Christian communities always be places of acceptance and open and calm debate; may they be agents of reconciliation and of peace, a stimulus for all of society in pursuit of the common good and in care for those most in need; may they be agents of cultural encounter.

Facing the precarious conditions threatening various levels of society, especially families, the elderly and the sick, as well as facing the moral and spiritual fragility of so many people, above all among the youth, the Christian community as a whole feels questioned, beginning with pastors, and markedly with the Bishop. He is called to offer in every place the response of Christ, by dedicating himself wholeheartedly to the service of the Gospel, by sanctifying, teaching and guiding the People of God.

I, thus, urge you to persevere in prayer, to be generous in serving your people, full of zeal in proclaiming the Word. It is your responsibility to support these priests with fatherly affection: they are your main collaborators and their parish ministry necessarily requires stability both in realizing a fruitful pastoral programme and in fostering a climate of trust and serenity among the people. I encourage you to promote a vocations apostolate in an ever more organic and detailed way, so as to foster, especially in the young, the quest for meaning and gift of self to God and neighbour. Let your attention also focus on the pastoral care of families: the family is a load-bearing element of the life of society and only by working to promote the family can you renew the fabric of the ecclesial community and of civil society itself. How can we fail to see, then, the importance of the presence of Catholics in public life, as well as in the sector of communications? It also depends on you, to ensure that one can always hear the voice of truth in the problems of the moment and one can perceive the Church as an ally of men and women, at the service of their dignity.

We all know the fundamental importance of union and solidarity among bishops, as well as their communion with the Successor of Peter. This fraternal union is equally essential for the efficacy of the work of your Episcopal Conference, which can give you more authority with the civil authorities of your country, whether in ordinary life when facing more delicate problems. As regards finances it is necessary to develop a system which, keeping in mind that the practical means are exclusively destined to serve the spiritual mission of the Church, can guarantee the basics for free pastoral work in every ecclesial reality. Attentive watchfulness is important so that the ecclesial goods administered with prudence and transparency may be safeguarded and preserved, also with the help of trustworthy and competent lay people.

Dear Brothers, I express to you my gratitude for the tireless pastoral work that you undertake in

your churches and I assure you of my spiritual closeness and my support in prayer. Invoking upon you and your ministry the intercession of the Holy Virgin, I ask you to pray for me always and I impart my blessing to you, to your priests, to the consecrated and to all the lay faithful.