



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II TO THE BISHOPS FROM CANADA ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT

Tuesday, 27 September 1988

Dear Brother Bishops,

1. It is a great joy for me to welcome you to Rome for your visit *ad Limina Apostolorum*. These visits have profound significance for the life of the Church and for our membership in the College of Bishops. By praying at the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul, whose blood has consecrated this city, and by visiting the Successor of Peter, who is the “perpetual and visible source and foundation of unity” for the whole Church, you renew and strengthen the ecclesial communion which is at the heart of the Church’s life. This communion is manifested in the profession of one faith, in the common celebration of divine worship, especially the Eucharist, and in the fraternal harmony of God’s family. Our mutual encounter verifies the universal character of the Episcopal college and renews our awareness of that “solicitude for the whole Church” which every bishop must have at heart. Our meeting also serves to confirm and validate the life of your particular Churches within the Church universal.

2. This mystery of communion is rooted in God himself and in his work of creation. The fact that human beings are created in the “image and likeness” of God means not only that each one possesses an inalienable dignity and rights; it also means that each one is called to live in relationship to other human beings within the one human family. Thus the Second Vatican Council reminds us: “We cannot truly invoke God the Father of all if there are people created in the image of God whom we refuse to treat in a brotherly way. Man’s relation to God the Father and man’s relation to his fellowmen are so joined together that the Scripture says: ‘He who does not love, does not know God’

Moreover, we know that God chose to share with us his own divine life. When in Adam humanity had fallen, God did not abandon us but held out the promise of salvation. In the “fullness of time”

he sent his own Son, so that we might receive the gift of eternal life in a new creation, and might live in union with God and with one another. The Church is born out of this divine desire to “gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad”, so that “they may have life, and have it abundantly”. As I stated in my Encyclical Letter “*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*”: “Beyond human and natural bonds, already so close and strong, there is discerned in the light of faith a new model of the unity of the human race, which must ultimately inspire our solidarity. This supreme model of unity, which is a reflection of the intimate life of God... is what we Christians mean by the word “communion”. This specifically Christian communion, jealously preserved, extended and enriched with the Lord’s help, is the soul of the Church’s vocation to be a ‘ sacrament ’”.

Hence the universal character of God’s plan of love is made visible in the Church Communion with our heavenly Father – through Christ and in the Holy Spirit – also means communion with all our brothers and sisters in the household of faith. This in turn must inspire our solidarity with all people, in keeping with the Church’s mission to be a “sign and instrument of intimate union with God and of the unity of the whole human race”.

3. Dear brothers, the ecclesial communion that you and your people bear witness to every day is a prophetic sign of God’s universal kingdom. Ecclesial communion respects the differences of geography, race, nation, history and culture – indeed it is enriched by them – but it also transcends these differences in a universal “kiss of peace”, in an embrace of unity, charity and peace. As Saint Paul reminds us with regard to Baptism: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus”. As bishops you foster a true spirit of ecclesial communion among the clergy, religious and laity of the particular Churches entrusted to you. Just as a strong sense of ecclesial communion does not diminish the importance of the particular Church, but opens it up to the universality of Christ and the Gospel, so too each individual believer will find his or her own Christian life broadened and deepened rather than diminished by an openness to this mystery.

4. Cette façon de comprendre la vie de l’Eglise et sa mission répond assurément “aux signes des temps”, c’est-à-dire aux aspirations des hommes d’aujourd’hui pour l’unité et la fraternité, pour la justice et la paix. Le monde nous paraît plus petit à cause des progrès de la science et de la technologie, notamment dans le domaine des transports et des communications, et aussi en raison d’une plus grande interdépendance politique et économique. Mais ces développements sont insuffisants pour assurer l’unité morale et spirituelle de la famille humaine. C’est seulement en chassant l’appréhension que nous ressentons souvent quand nous entrons en contact avec des personnes et des cultures étrangères à la nôtre, en surmontant notre indifférence aux besoins de ceux qui sont éloignés de nos préoccupations journalières, que nous pouvons espérer approcher d’une véritable “unité de la race humaine tout entière”, enracinée dans la Création et la Rédemption.

On peut dire aussi que les grands problèmes du monde d’aujourd’hui ont un caractère universel.

Leurs conséquences, en bien comme en mal, ne sont plus limitées à un continent ou à une civilisation. Ces problèmes sont ceux de la guerre et de la paix, de l'environnement, du développement économique, du partage des "biens", ceux liés aussi aux réalités humaines les plus fondamentales, comme la dignité et les droits de la personne humaine depuis la conception jusqu'à la mort, le mariage et la famille, et la signification du travail. Tous ces problèmes posent un défi à un développement authentique de l'humanité.

En tant que membres de l'Eglise, nous croyons que ces grands problèmes ont un caractère éthique, et qu'ils ne peuvent pas être résolus pour le bien de l'humanité sans référence à Dieu et à l'ordre moral qu'il a établi en créant et en rachetant le monde. Mais cette conviction qui est la nôtre ne se réduit pas à des mots. Nous devons aussi être des témoins et des exemples de communion et de solidarité, à la fois comme individus et comme communauté, en tant qu'Eglise.

5. La solidarité avec tous les enfants de Dieu se manifeste de différentes manières. Tout d'abord, il y a la solidarité avec ceux qui ont des besoins spirituels, c'est-à-dire le grand nombre de ceux qui, parmi nous ou au loin, n'ont pas entendu parler du Christ, ou qui ne cheminent plus avec lui, par indifférence ou parce qu'il leur est devenu étranger. Il y a tous ceux qui, dans des sociétés prospères comme la vôtre, font l'expérience d'un vide spirituel et ont faim et soif de Dieu. Etre solidaire spirituellement signifie également rejoindre ceux dont la vie personnelle ou familiale connaît des difficultés, ceux qui ne sont pas aimés, les malades de corps et d'esprit, tous ceux qui souffrent. Je sais que vos Eglises locales ne sont pas restées indifférentes à ces personnes. Par les initiatives organisées dans les diocèses, dans les groupes et les mouvements catholiques, et à travers le témoignage indispensable des membres du clergé, des religieux, des religieuses et des laïcs, l'amour du Christ pour ces personnes spirituellement dans le besoin est rendu visible dans votre société.

Ce genre de solidarité requiert un haut niveau de sensibilité personnelle et d'engagement; il est essentiel à toute autre forme de solidarité.

6. Solidarity also means a sharing of material goods with others, especially the world's poor, towards whom we must show a preferential love. It is my conviction that "...this love of preference for the poor, and the decisions which it inspires in us, cannot but embrace the immense multitudes of the hungry, the needy, the homeless, those without medical care and, above all, those without hope of a better future. It is impossible not to take account of the existence of these realities. To ignore them would mean becoming like the "rich man" who pretended not to know the beggar Lazarus lying at his gate. Our daily life as well as our decisions in the political and economic fields must be marked by these realities". True solidarity requires that we work to eliminate the roots of human misery, both at home and abroad, even if this means some personal sacrifice on our part: even if it touches our own "necessities" and not just our "surplus". The people of Canada are well known for their generous response to the world's poor and for their willingness to work for a more just world. As the leaven and "soul" of human society" the Church has a special obligation to

deepen this generosity and concern on the part of all.

7. Solidarity also has a prophetic dimension. Love for humanity compels the Church to speak the truth about God and about man, as he has been created and redeemed. She does so without hesitation or fear when the very dignity and rights of the human person are threatened in modern society. Her only fear is to have failed to proclaim the truth with love, or to have failed to work and pray unceasingly that humanity will choose what is good and reject what is evil. I would repeat what [I said during my visit to your country in 1984](#): “Of incalculable danger to all humanity is the rate of abortion in society today. This unspeakable crime against human life which rejects and kills life at its beginning sets the stage for despising, negating and eliminating the life of adults, and for attacking the life of society. If the weak are vulnerable from the time of conception, then they are vulnerable in old age, and they are vulnerable before the might of an aggressor and the power of nuclear weapons”. The Church also fulfils a mission of service when she upholds the dignity as well as the moral rights and duties that belong to marriage, the family, education and work.

8. Dear brothers, within the universal communion of the Church Bishops have the duty so simply yet so eloquently described by Pope Gregory the Great in a homily on Ezekiel. “Note”, he writes, “that a man whom the Lord sends forth as a preacher is called a watchman. A watchman always stands on a height so that he can see from afar what is coming. Anyone appointed to be a watchman for the people must stand on a height for all his life to help them by his foresight”. We who are shepherds must always strive for this higher and wider view of the human landscape, so that we can lead others to a deeper understanding of the Church’s universal communion and to a more active solidarity with the whole human race. May you always persevere in this ministry, so that through your vigilance and wisdom the Church may truly be a “sign and instrument” of Christ’s renewal and transformation of human society into the family of God.

Through you I send warm greetings to all the clergy, religious and laity of your dioceses. I pray that they too may always be faithful witnesses to God’s universal love. As a pledge of grace and peace in our Lord Jesus Christ, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.

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