



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE CATHOLIC PASTORS OF THE CAUCASUS
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Friday, 9 February 2001

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and the Priesthood!

1. It is a great joy for me to offer you a cordial welcome during your *ad limina* visit, by which you intend to strengthen the sentiments of communion between you and the Successor of Peter. I thank Archbishop Nerses der Nersessian for his kind words expressing the sentiments you share. In addressing you, dear Pastors, I would like to express my sincere affection to the faithful of your Churches. I remember them all in my daily prayer.

Our meeting is taking place at the beginning of a new millennium. The legacy bequeathed by the difficult century just ended confronts the Church in many regions with urgent and complex problems. In the field of evangelization and the care of the Christian people, the first task that awaits you is certainly the rebuilding of your respective communities, small flocks that have long been buffeted and dispersed.

2. The experience you have had in recent years convinces you that the proclamation of the Gospel can not only restore courage to the Ecclesial Communities, but also contribute to the effective building of a new society based on sound ethical and moral values. In all your efforts maintain firm trust in God. For it is he who builds up the Church and guides the way of peoples according to his inscrutable plan of salvation.

Be convinced messengers of a new culture which, by preaching respect for everyone on the part of all, will be based on lasting spiritual values and will recognize God's primacy in life.

Strengthened by this awareness, work without delay to spread hope by using every means to encourage the cooperation of all in proclaiming the Gospel.

First, you must foster in your flocks a new mentality, inspired by the civilization of love, which will strengthen respect for every human being. Do not be afraid to speak out in defence of every just cause and explicitly offer the gift you have received: faith in Christ who has chosen you. Bear witness to his saving message, which is addressed to all nations.

3. To carry out this prophetic mission, your communities must acquire an increasing awareness of their vocation. In my Apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte*, I thought of the Church as a barque which must venture upon the vast ocean that God is opening before her at the beginning of the millennium, I invited Pastors and faithful to "set out anew from Christ", sustained by hope, facing their new tasks with firm trust in the unfailing support of Providence. This vast apostolic work must utilize the energies of priests, religious and lay people. May their formation be your priority concern so that, by drawing from the treasury of prayer and study, they can share the problems of our contemporaries and offer to everyone the substantial food of God's word.

Special attention should be paid to young people, who are the future of the Church and of humanity. If Christ calls them to follow him on the path of the priesthood or consecrated life, support them and involve the whole Christian community in the necessary work of vocations.

4. The priority tasks to which you must tirelessly devote your time remain "prayer and the ministry of the word" (Acts 6: 4). The Lord chose you for this reason, so that after praying at length you might proclaim his Gospel and bring the hope and comfort of his love to all. From prolonged contact with him you can draw the necessary enthusiasm to continue courageously proclaiming the Good News of the kingdom and communicating the message of the merciful love of God, who reaches out to all human misery.

Despite the scarce means at your disposal, do not forget the poor and those in difficulty. The harsh legacy of the past presents you with fragile families, threatened by the social plagues of divorce and abortion. And how many in your lands are tempted by the mirages of practical materialism and consumer hedonism! Stay close to your people, offering them concrete support enlivened by the comfort of faith. Above all, remember your young people, who are searching for solid reasons for facing a future that is often unclear to them.

Please assure everyone of my spiritual closeness. Know that I share your daily pastoral concerns. May love for Christ's flock spur each of you to work in active harmony, so that "love which binds everything together in perfect harmony" (Col 3: 14) may be firmly rooted in the Church. May the heavenly Mother of God protect you and go with you!

With these sentiments and as a pledge of my affection, I give you a special Apostolic Blessing,

which I gladly extend to the whole flock entrusted by God's mercy to your care.

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