



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS OF THE ECCLESIASTICAL PROVINCE
OF PARIS AND THE MILITARY ORDINARIATE OF FRANCE
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Friday, 20 February 2004

*Your Eminence,
Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,*

1. I am pleased to greet you, Pastors of the Province of Paris and the Military Ordinary, on the occasion of your *ad limina* visit. I thank Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger for the kind words he has just addressed to me. I earnestly hope that your visit, which enables you to meet the Successor of Peter, will strengthen you in your mission at the service of evangelization. Proclaiming the Gospel is the special mission of the Bishop and an “outstanding manifestation of his spiritual fatherhood” as Pastor. He “must be aware of the challenges of the present hour and have the courage to face them” (*Pastores Gregis*, n. 26). We cannot forget the words of the Apostle to the Gentiles: “Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!” (I Cor 9:16). The Council recalled the urgent need of evangelization to “bring to all men that light of Christ which shines out visibly from the Church” (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 1).

2. The quinquennial reports describe *the secularization of French society*, often understood as a rejection in the social life of those anthropological, religious and moral values that left a deep mark on it. Hence, even for those who are already baptized, the need for a renewed proclamation of the Gospel is making itself felt, to the point of noticing that almost everywhere a first proclamation of the Gospel is necessary (cf. *Ecclesia in Europa*, nn. 46-47). You also mention that fewer and fewer children attend catechetical instruction, while at the same time you are pleased with the growing number of catechumens among young people and adults, as well as the rediscovery of the sacrament of Confirmation. These signs show that the transmission of the faith can spread, despite difficult conditions. May the cries of people who want “to see Jesus” (Jn 12:21) and knock

at the door of the Church help you inspire a new springtime in evangelization and catechesis! I am following with interest your Conference's reflections with a view to proposing the faith in contemporary society and inviting the diocesan communities to regain new boldness in this area, a daring that stems from love for Christ and for his Church and which can be found in sacramental life and prayer.

3. With regard to *catechesis for children and young people*, it is important to offer them a high-quality religious and moral education based on the clear and solid elements of faith which lead to an intense spiritual life. As the Fathers of the Church used to say a child is also *capax Dei*, open to the sacramental dimension that leads to a dignified and beautiful human life. To constitute the solid core of existence, catechetical formation must be accompanied by regular religious practice. How can the proposal made to children truly take root in them and how can Christ transform their being and their action from within if they do not meet him regularly (cf. *Dies Domini*, n. 36; *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, n. 31)? It is also important that with respect to the laws in force, the Authorities concerned make room for catechesis and for the religious practice of the faithful, privately and in the community, recalling that this dimension of life has a positive effect on social relations and on people's lives. I would like to express cordial thanks to the diocesan catechetical service and to all the catechists who are dedicated to the religious education of youth. I encourage them to persevere in their beautiful and noble mission, so important in the contemporary world, and always to take care to transmit faithfully the treasure the Church has received from the Apostles (cf. Acts 16:5), so that the Christian people may grow and truly achieve ecclesial communion. Perhaps they will not always see the immediate results of their activity, but may they know that what they sow in hearts God will be able to develop, for it is he who gives the growth (cf. I Cor 3:7). May they remember that it is the future of the transmission of faith and the practice of it that are at stake! The visibility of the Church of the future will also largely depend on them.

Therefore, attention should be paid to *the formation of parents and catechists*, so that they may go to the heart of the faith they must communicate. Christian life is not built on a mere sociological attitude, nor on the knowledge of a few rudiments of the Christian message that would not lead to participation in the life of the Church. It would be a sign that faith had remained totally outside people. Pastors and catechists will also remember that children and young people are particularly sensitive to *the consistency between people's words and their actual life*. Indeed, how can young people become aware of the need to take part in the Sunday Eucharist or the practice of the sacrament of Penance if their parents or teachers do not themselves lead this type of religious life in church? The more in tune the witness of faith and morals is with the profession of faith, the better young people will understand how Christian life brightens the whole of life and gives it its strength and depth. Daily witness is the seal of authentic teaching.

I invite you to continue to be concerned with *the formation of young people* by seeking appropriate forms of teaching. In response to their desire for a warm human experience, suggest to them that they become acquainted with Christ and meet him in a strong and structured process of personal

and community prayer. In this regard, I know that you are committed to the continual renewal of all catechetical and educational tools used for catechesis, in conformity with the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and the *General Directory for Catechesis*, which provide the theological bases and key points of catechetical teaching for people in all categories.

4. In this perspective, the vocation and mission of the baptized in the Ecclesial Community and in the world can only be understood in the light of the mystery of the Church, “a sign and instrument... of communion with God and of unity among all men” (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 1). In this spirit it is important that a way of acquiring knowledge of the faith be suggested to the faithful that will enable them to harmonize their religious and human knowledge better, so that they can achieve an ever stronger synthesis between their scientific and technical knowledge and their religious experience. I am delighted with the suggestion to promote *schools of faith* in the heart of university institutions, or outside them but with their support, for they are particularly well-suited to providing high-quality teaching, faithful to the Magisterium, in a perspective that is not only intellectual but also concerned to develop the spiritual and liturgical life of the Christian people and help them discover the moral requirements associated with living in accordance with the Gospel. I would like to recognize the activity of the Cathedral School of Paris that forms many people in your Province and invites each one to deepen untiringly the mystery of faith so that having understood and assimilated it better, he or she may pass it on in a suitable language but without changing its substance. It seems to me that this harmonization between a rational understanding of the gift revealed and an inculturated transmission of it is one of the world's challenges today. I would also like to hail and to encourage the initiative some Pastors have taken in a certain number of European capitals, by joining forces in order to give a new impetus to evangelization in the great cities on the Continent, thus contributing to reviving the Christian soul of Europe and reminding Europeans of the tenets of the faith of their ancestors who helped build the peoples and international relations.

5. I would also like to draw your attention to *the catechetical and evangelizing role of the liturgy*, which must be understood as a path to holiness, the inner strength of apostolic dynamism and the missionary character of the Church (cf. Apostolic Letter *Spiritus et Sponsa* for the 40th anniversary of the Conciliar Constitution on the Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 6). The purpose of catechesis is, in fact, to proclaim in the Church faith in the one God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and to reject “all service of any human absolute”. It thus forms the life and actions of men and women (cf. *General Directory for Catechesis*, nn. 82-83). Hence, it is important that Pastors take ever greater care in the preparation of the Sunday liturgy with the collaboration of lay people, paying special attention to the rite and to the beauty of the celebration. Indeed, the entire liturgy speaks of the divine mystery. Along the lines of the *World Youth Day in Paris*, your Conference is working happily on the renewal of catechesis in order to keep the proclamation of the faith constantly focused on the experience of the Easter Vigil, the heart of the Christian mystery, which proclaims the death and Resurrection of the Saviour until he comes again in glory. In their homilies, priests will take care to teach the faithful the doctrinal and scriptural foundations of the

faith. I once again strongly appeal to all the faithful to root their spiritual experience and mission in the Eucharist around the Bishop, who is minister and endorser of communion in the diocesan Church, for “wherever the Bishop is... there is the Catholic Church” (St Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Church of Smyrna*, 8, 2).

6. At the end of our meeting, I ask you *to convey my affectionate greetings to your communities*. Thank the priests and religious communities of your Dioceses, who are generously dedicated to proclaiming the Kingdom of God! My thoughts today go to all those who are unstinting in their efforts for young people, in parish catechesis, in the institutions and movements where catechetical activities take place; the Church is grateful to them for their commitment to making Christ better known and better loved. Please pass the Pope's gratitude on to those who devote themselves to charitable activities in the name of the Gospel. Are not they in a certain way “catecheses in action” that help people to discover Christ's love? France has produced many saints who knew how to combine catechetical teaching and works of charity, such as St Vincent de Paul or, again, St Marcellin Champagnat, an eminent teacher whom I had the joy of canonizing.

I entrust your Dioceses to the protection of the Most Holy Virgin Mary, whom I would like to invoke with you under the title “Star of the Sea”; may she guide Christian people in fidelity to their Baptism, whatever the stumbling blocks of the time may be, so that they may walk joyfully towards the encounter with Christ the Saviour. To you yourselves, to the priests, the deacons, the consecrated persons and all the faithful, I impart an affectionate Apostolic Blessing.