



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO THE BISHOPS OF THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE OF LATVIA AND ESTONIA
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Thursday, 11 June 2015

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

I joyfully receive you on the occasion of your visit *ad limina Apostolorum*; I cordially greet each one of you and the particular Churches that the Lord has entrusted to your paternal guidance.

Since we share the episcopal vocation and service to the People of God, our meeting enables us to reinforce the bonds of fraternity that bind us despite the distance.

The Lord has chosen you to work in a society that, after being long oppressed by regimes founded on ideologies contrary to human dignity and freedom, is called today to measure itself against other dangerous hidden perils, such as secularism and relativism. Although this may render your pastoral action more difficult, I exhort you to continue tirelessly, without ever losing confidence in proclaiming the Gospel of Christ, word of salvation for men of all times and all cultures.

You are not alone in this renewed evangelization. You have your priests who, though few and of varied providences, are at your side with respect, obedience and generosity. Together with them you feel the urgency of an active vocational pastoral activity which, leaning on prayer addressed to the "Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest" (Mt 9:38), takes on the burden of sensitizing families, parishes and the whole Christian community, so that children and young people may be helped to render themselves available to God's call.

Thinking always of priests, I encourage you to be very attentive to their formation, both regarding a plan for theological and ecclesial preparation and one for human maturity, rooted in a solid

spirituality and characterized by a cordial openness and capable of discernment of the reality of the world in which we live.

Moreover, for the growth and journey of your Communities the presence of consecrated men and women is more precious than ever. Especially in this Year dedicated to them, it is opportune to make them understand that they are appreciated not only for the service they render, but even before for the intrinsic richness of their charisms and their witness, by the very fact that they are spreading, in the midst of the People of God, Christ's scent followed on the path of the evangelical counsels. However, consecrated men and women also need both spiritual and material support, also through common celebrations and opportune moments of encounter and intense spirituality, in order to foster familiarity and reciprocal knowledge and to reinforce, around the Bishop, the sense of belonging to the particular Church and the joyful willingness to cooperate in its edification.

The involvement of the laity is also indispensable to the mission of evangelization. Thanks be to God, you can rely on the commitment of many good Catholics in different ecclesial activities. Your closeness and solicitude will help them to carry forward those responsibilities which, according to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, they are called to accept in the cultural, social, political but also charitable and catechetical fields. Entrusted to you is the task of watching over and motivating them so that at the diocesan and parochial level, as well as in the Associations and Ecclesial Movements, they can shape their conscience and deepen their sense of the Church, in particular the knowledge of her Social Doctrine. The lay faithful are the living means between what we Pastors preach and the different social environments. They must always feel the heart of the Church nearby!

At the same time, both you and they are in daily contact with the other Christian traditions present in your territory, and together you can sustain the ecumenical dialogue, so necessary today, also in view of that social peace shaken at times by ethnic and linguistic differences.

I also wish to share with you the firm will to promote the family, as a gift of God for the fulfillment of man and woman created in his image and as the "fundamental cell of society", a place "where we learn to live with others despite our differences and to belong to one another" and "where parents pass on the faith to their children" (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 66). Instead we must confirm that today marriage is often considered a form of affective gratification which can be constituted in any way and modified according to each one's sensibility (cf. *ibid.*). Unfortunately such a reductive concept also influences the mentality of Christians, facilitating the recourse to divorce or *de facto* separation. We Pastors are called to question ourselves on the marriage preparation of engaged young people and also on how to assist all those who experience these situations, so that children do not become the first victims and spouses do not feel excluded from God's mercy and the solicitude of the Church, but that they are helped in their journey of faith and the Christian education of the children.

The economic and social crisis that has also assailed your countries has, unfortunately, fostered emigration, so that in your communities there are often single-parent families in need of special pastoral care. The absence of the father or the mother in many families entails from the other spouse greater effort, in every sense, in raising the children. Your care and the pastoral charity of your priests, united with the active closeness of the communities, is truly precious for these families.

Dear Brothers, in all your ministry I would like you to feel my affection and support, as I also feel consoled by your fraternal charity, witnessed by this visit. While I thank you for the prayers that you and your communities raise to the Lord for me and for my service to the Church, I entrust you to the maternal intercession of Mary Most Holy and to the protection of St Meinard, and from my heart I bless you, the priests, the men and women religious and all the lay faithful entrusted to your pastoral care.