



Address of His Excellency the Most Reverend Luigi Ventura
Apostolic Nuncio
to the Plenary Assembly of the CCCB
October 15, 2007

Dear brother Bishops,

I am pleased to be with you once more, on the occasion of the annual gathering of all the Bishops of Canada. This is certainly a moment of ecclesial communion, a substantial element of our identity as Successors of the college of the twelve Apostles, called to testify in a qualified manner to the risen Lord. In our time, with the convincing light of the Gospel, and also with challenges previously unknown, we are invited to give "*reason for our hope*" (cf. I Peter 3:15), assured that we cannot be shy, or pessimistic, but full of confidence in the presence and power of the One who has called us into the ministry of Pastors.

The experience of the disciples on the way to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35) inspires us always. "*They conversed among themselves,*" says Saint Luke, "*of all that had happened*"; we also try to put together various events, share our preoccupations and our projects for the future. Saint Luke goes on: while at first they were "*looking downcast*", the presence of Jesus who walks with them transforms their hearts into "*burning*". Jesus "*explains the Scriptures to them*" and they recognize him "*in the breaking of the bread.*" Day after day, we continue to nourish ourselves with the same Word of God and the same Bread of Life.

Along the same lines, the year 2008 will be marked by two major events concerning the *Word* and the *Bread* of Life: the International Eucharistic Congress taking place in Quebec this June and the Synod on the Word of God in the fall, both graces for the universal Church, and for the Church in Canada.

In the name of the Holy Father, I would like to thank each of you for your Episcopal ministry, accomplished generously every day; in the service of the People of God, we try, as he himself said some moments after his election, to be "*humble workers in the vineyard of the Lord*" (April 19, 2005).

- 1- I would want to thank in particular His Excellency Archbishop André Gaumond who guided your Conference during the last two years; I thank him for his collaboration, as well as that of the staff of the Episcopal Conference, with the Apostolic Nunciature. I would also like to congratulate the Conference for publishing the booklet recalling the *Ad limina Visit 2006*; it is a valuable instrument presenting, in the addresses of the Bishops as well as in the speeches of the Holy Father, a significant page in the life of the Church in Canada: its challenges and its projects.
- 2- As you know, the Nunciature welcomes this year a new Counsellor, Msgr. Luca Lorusso, from the Archdiocese of Taranto; he has worked in Senegal, at the Secretariat of State, in Croatia and in Jordan. He has taken the place of Msgr. Michael Crotty, presently in Iraq.
- 3- During the past year since our last meeting, the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, has given us the gift of light, of intelligence and truth with which he proposes the mystery of faith and illumines the reality and the challenges which we all live! This year, I would like to draw your attention to a guiding theme of his Magisterium. In the first place, there is an ardent desire to build unity within the Church, in keeping with the ministry that is his as the Successor of Peter. In the second place, there is a centering of the faith of the Church on its foundation of Jesus Christ, Son of God and Son of Man, and the Gospel, which preserves the authentic memory of his work. I thus call to mind three documents that the Pope has signed and one that he has approved.

- 4- First, the *Letter to the Catholics of China* (May 27, 2007), made public on June 30. The Holy Father aims to rebuild the unity of this Church that factions of the political order wanted to divide. While presenting new directions and more precise criteria, he indicates to the 'official' and 'clandestine' communities the way of reconciliation and communion. He specifies clearly the precise role of the State and the role of the Church, with their distinctions and their reciprocal relations, and with respect for religious freedom. Our prayer accompanies these well-proven brothers in their witness of faith.
- 5- Second, the *Motu Proprio Summorum Pontificum*, of July 7 and which came into effect on September 14. In his explanatory letter addressed to all the Bishops, the Pope wanted to ensure that the Rite established by Paul VI would remain the normal liturgical form; it is not, as some wanted to believe, an imposed turning back of the clock. Faced with abuses that were committed with a creativity devoid of rules, which led to a reduction of the Eucharist, the Pope wanted everyone to pay attention to the sacred character of the liturgy. He underlined the continuity of the tradition of the Church which never broke with her past, but which is a source of unification and action. In the Latin Rite, there have always existed several recognized liturgical rites.
- 6- The Holy Father also proceeded to make a '*little electoral reform*' while cancelling one of the innovative points of the legislation governing Conclaves promulgated by John Paul II in 1996. He resumed the millenary tradition that requires a two-thirds majority of the votes of the Cardinal electors. One can see here the desire and will to assure that the elected Pope will be a sign of the unity of the Church, expressed by a large majority of votes.
- 7- On the other hand, with the approval of the Holy Father, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith published on June 29 the *Responses to Certain Questions regarding certain Aspects of the Doctrine of the Church*, where explained the meaning of the conciliar expression "*Ecclesia subsistit in*", found in *Lumen Gentium* n. 8. This expression recalls the historic continuity and the permanence in the Catholic Church of all the elements instituted by

Christ. Dialogue in general, and ecumenical dialogue in particular, is possible and authentic only when it is done with the knowledge of the identity of the speakers and the clarity of their thoughts; furthermore, in contemporary culture, some doubt that man can attain any truth but that which is purely subjective and provisional, in the religious domain as in ethics. Thus we find in this document, which does not introduce any substantial novelty, the desire to respond to certain current trends in which the Church of Christ no longer exists concretely, and is merely a project under construction. Between the lines, one can also read that the Christian faith is put in question in its essential content and components, the knowledge of God and of his revelation in Jesus Christ. Finally, it seems to me that we find in this text the desire to invite the Church to the communion of faith and tradition of the twenty-one Ecumenical Councils of history.

- 8- Following the Synod of 2005 on the Eucharist, recalling the recommendations of the Fathers, the Pope proposes a teaching calling for our faith and our practice in the Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum caritatis*, published on February 22, 2007. In the Eucharistic mystery, we are called to become '*gift*', gift of life for all, following the way of the cross and the example of the risen Christ on the way to Emmaus. I think that knowledge and study of this text by the faithful will contribute to the preparation for the International Eucharistic Congress in Quebec. I would like here to thank the organizing Committee for the great work already accomplished in this important project, and I express also my best wishes for the success of this extraordinary event that will take place on Canadian soil. The celebrations that surround the 400th anniversary of Quebec City, and consequently, of the arrival of the Catholic faith to this part of the world, enrich themselves through openness to the spiritual dimension. The faithful will thus have another opportunity to rediscover the central place of the Eucharist in Christian life and the fundamental role that it has played and can play again in the building of a better society.
- 9- Last May, the Holy Father carried out a pastoral visit to Brazil for the 5th CELAM Conference. In his opening speech on May 13, we can say that he presented a school of Christianity: "*To start again from Christ in all the places of mission.*" The Church defends the

identity of peoples while respecting a *'healthy secularity'*, but also while presenting *"the great criteria and inalienable values, guiding consciences and offering them a choice for life."*

The challenge to proclaim the Gospel in the modern context, particularly in America, is also the object of your reflections during this meeting. The conditions that we find in Canada are in a certain measure similar to the ones that we face in Latin America, as in other regions of the world. Imagination and courage, even on the structural level, are required of our generation to respond to these problems, in fidelity to the mission of evangelization.

- 10- Other travels in Italy and in Austria were occasions for the Holy Father to offer to these ecclesial communities and also to the entire Church deep and enlightening teachings. Several elements that characterize the European situation can also be found on this side of the Atlantic, in particular a distancing from the world of faith and the consequent necessity for intensification of apostolic work.
- 11- In Vigevano and Pavia, during the month of April, the Pope reflected on Saint Augustine, one of the most famous Fathers of the Church. Benedict XVI recognized the deep impact this great theologian had on him. He also wanted to offer again to the Church and to the world his Encyclical *Deus caritas Est*, whose first section, confesses the Pontiff, is *"deeply indebted to the thought of St. Augustine, who was in love with the Love of God and sang of it, meditated upon it, preached it in all his writings and above all witnessed to it in his pastoral ministry."*
- 12- In addition to these official documents and great addresses, the Pope continues his ordinary Magisterium through more familiar discussions; I refer here to the Wednesday audiences. In a great wealth of thought, he proposes anew the exemplary way of the Church of the first centuries, beginning with the Apostles and continuing with the Fathers of the Church and their spiritual and theological patrimony. From these brief texts, we can thus benefit from a particularly valuable synthesis, at both the historical and theological levels.

Also very interesting are the Sunday catecheses of the Angelus, which I would almost call homilies, where the Holy Father comments regularly on the Sunday Gospel. Jesus Christ, the Gospel, and the Church are the avenues which he illuminates with intelligence through his ministry and which he proposes to the Church: *“the Gospel proclamation remains the first service that the Church owes to humanity in order to offer Christ's salvation to the people of our time, in so many ways humiliated and oppressed, and to give a Christian orientation to the cultural, social and ethical changes that are taking place in the world”* (October 7, 2007).

- 13- Although informal, some familiar exchanges are so revealing of the personality of the Pope: his attentive ear, his adherence to the principles of the faith, and at the same time his keen pastoral direction that does not forget the problems and sufferings of his brothers and sisters. Thus, during a dialogue with priests, he was presented with questions on: formation of conscience, the life and ministry of priests, the situation of divorced couples, the decrease in vocations, youth and hope, and being Catholic (July 24, 2007).

In his responses, he expressed a lively awareness of the problems of concrete life, which he always exposed to the inspiring light of the Gospel.

- 14- Let me call to your attention an extract, rather long, of this discussion. *“The fundamental question of our pastoral work is how to bring God to the world, to our contemporaries. Of course, bringing God is a multi-dimensional task: already in Jesus' preaching, in his life and his death we see how this One develops in so many dimensions. I think that we should always be mindful of two things: on the one hand, the Christian proclamation. Christianity is not a highly complicated collection of so many dogmas that it is impossible for anyone to know them all; it is not something exclusively for academicians who can study these things, but it is something simple: God exists and God is close in Jesus Christ. Thus, to sum up, Jesus Christ himself said that the Kingdom of God had arrived. Basically, what we preach is one, simple thing. All the dimensions subsequently revealed are dimensions of this one thing and all people do not have to know everything but must*

certainly enter into the depths and into the essential. In this way, the different dimensions also unfold with ever increasing joy.”

- 15- With some surprise, Joseph Ratzinger / Benedict XVI published his book *Jesus of Nazareth*. This is a gift of his 80th birthday, a synthesis of the research of all his life, and the fruit of a personal dialogue with the Lord. This was a considerable success; some called it the '*pastoral approach of intelligence*'. After a long interior journey, gathering the research and synthesis of a life spent in study and in the service of the truth, Benedict XVI addresses seekers of God and proposes to them Jesus, as he is revealed in the Gospels. He overcomes the division desired by some between the Jesus of history and the Jesus of faith. He shows how in the Gospels there are all the justifications to confirm and to root our faith.
- 16- The invitation to identify oneself with Christ, underlined in the whole book and in many words of the Holy Father, inspires within us the desire for a continual asceticism at the personal and communal levels. Our Churches have in Jesus Christ their unique point of reference, concrete and effective. Centered on him, we are obedient to his Word and to the tradition that it has given rise to during those times; we in our turn eagerly accept to be a sign of contradiction: in fact, "*No disciple is greater than his Master*" (Matthew 10:24).
- 17- Allow me again to read to you a text that, I believe, can be inspiring for our ministry and our lives as Bishops. While addressing newly ordained Bishops on September 22, 2007, the Pope said: "*In a Bishop's ministry today the organizational aspects are absorbing, the commitments many, and the needs always numerous, but the first place in the life of a successor of the Apostles must be kept for God. Especially in this way will we help our faithful. St. Gregory the Great had formerly recommended in his "Pastoral Rule" that the Pastor should in a singular way lead all the others in prayer and contemplation (cf. II, 5). This is what tradition was subsequently to formulate in the well-known saying: "Contemplata aliis tradere" (cf. St Thomas, Summa Theologiae, IIa-IIae, q. 188, art. 6). ... Prayer teaches people to love and opens hearts to pastoral charity in order to welcome all who turn to the Bishop. Modelled from within by the*

Holy Spirit, the Bishop consoles with the balsam of divine grace, enlightens with the light of the Word and reconciles and edifies in fraternal communion.”

- 18- With the intention of continuing the life of the Church and of renewing its strength from the witness and teaching of the Apostles, the Holy Father announced a Pauline Year during a homily given at St. Paul outside the Walls in Rome. I take this opportunity to let his words resound:

“I am pleased to announce officially that we shall be dedicating a special Jubilee Year to the Apostle Paul from 28 June 2008 to 29 June 2009, on the occasion of the bimillennium of his birth, which historians have placed between the years 7 and 10 A.D.

“It will be possible to celebrate this ‘Pauline Year’ in a privileged ay in Rome where the sarcophagus which, by the unanimous opinion of experts and an undisputed tradition, preserves the remains of the Apostle Paul beneath the Papal Altar of this Basilica for 20 centuries.

“It will thus be possible to have a series of liturgical, cultural and ecumenical events taking place at the Papal Basilica and at the adjacent Benedictine Abbey, as well as various pastoral and social initiatives, all inspired by Pauline spirituality.

“In addition, special attention will be given to penitential pilgrimages that will be organized to the Apostle's tomb to find in it spiritual benefit. Study conventions and special publications on Pauline texts will also be promoted in order to make ever more widely known the immense wealth of the teaching they contain, a true patrimony of humanity redeemed by Christ. Furthermore, in every part of the world, similar initiatives will be implemented in the dioceses, shrines and places of worship, by Religious and by the educational institutions and social-assistance centres which are named after St Paul or inspired by him and his teaching.

“Lastly, there is one particular aspect to which special attention must be paid during the celebration of the various moments of the 2,000th Pauline anniversary: I am referring to the ecumenical

dimension. The Apostle to the Gentiles, who was especially committed to taking the Good News to all peoples, left no stones unturned for unity and harmony among all Christians.

“May he deign to guide and protect us in this bimillennial celebration, helping us to progress in the humble and sincere search for the full unity of all the members of Christ's Mystical Body. Amen.” (June 28, 2007)

- 19- Finally, I thank you for the time you have given me to share this reflection with you. From this podium, I desire also to express my gratitude for the occasions of brotherly fellowship in your dioceses. Through these visits and by personal and written exchanges, I am all the more conscious of the great responsibilities that you assume in the Church, often amid the poverty of human means and resources. At times this could lead to hopelessness, because of the common understanding of belonging henceforth to a social and cultural minority, or because of difficulty in exercising the evangelical mission when faced with hostile forces, and being called followers of an ideal which our contemporaries seem to no longer desire.
- 20- Assured of interpreting the sentiments of the Pope, I can only express my very great esteem and my admiration for your generosity, determination and, despite all difficulties, faith and serenity, with which you accomplish your duties. Often what the media says on the subject of the Church is negative news, which actually covers only a limited number of cases, but which seems to be projected onto the whole community. Nevertheless, much goodness is still present; it exists and grows in the Church. Through you and with you, I would like to express my gratitude to the many people, the forgotten, unknown and courageous workers of the Gospel who pour out their dynamism without blowing their own horns, while offering their life in difficult conditions, as extraordinary witnesses of the free gift of life, of sharing and of faith.

Lastly, I would like to formulate in a prayer my wish that the Lord *“retribuat omnibus bona facientes, propter nomen suum”* (will reward all for the good they accomplish because of his name).