



**Address of His Excellency
The Most Rev. Luigi Ventura
Apostolic Nuncio to Canada
Plenary Assembly of the CCCB
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My dear brother Bishops and friends,

For the eighth time since my arrival in Canada, I find myself once again with you in this meeting of brothers which is the occasion for sharing our hopes and our faith. We relive, in a certain way, the spirit evoked by Saint Paul in his epistle to the Galatians: *“and when James and Cephas and John, who were acknowledged pillars, recognized the grace that had been given to me, they gave to Barnabas and me the right hand of fellowship”* (Galatians 2:9). In effect, I have the honour and the pleasant duty at this moment of my mission as Apostolic Nuncio, to symbolically shake your hands in the name of the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, as a sign of fraternal communion. Throughout the course of this week you will share both the joys and also the difficulties that arise from your apostolic undertakings, as well as the riches of your ecclesial communities, in the diversity and complementarity of their charisms; in an “experiment of charity” we recall our reason for being, that we are in the Church, by a call from Christ, for our fundamental purpose: to announce the Gospel of salvation.

In the solemn exhortation of the epistle to the Romans, Saint Paul recalls the nature of this mission:

*Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ,
called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,
which he promised beforehand through his prophets
in the Holy Scriptures,
the gospel concerning his Son,
who was descended from David according to the flesh
and was declared to be the Son of God with power according to
the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead,
Jesus Christ our Lord,
through whom we have received grace and apostleship
to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles.
(Romans 1:1-5)*

In our time, which is rich and complex, the Bishop must face several challenges in his mission. I would like first of all, to express my deep affection for you, and my appreciation for the work and the witness which you offer in the service of the Gospel of the Lord, both within the Church and within Canadian society.

I would like to draw your attention to some of the significant events that have marked the ecclesial life since our last meeting.

1. The 49th International Eucharistic Congress in Quebec this past June constituted a milestone for the Church in Canada and for the Church throughout the world. Carefully prepared over a long period of time, it was beautifully celebrated in Quebec City which was also celebrating the 400th anniversary of its foundation.

2. I am confident that I can interpret the sentiments of the Holy Father, who participated from a distance by means of television during the closing Eucharist blessed by a torrential downpour, in expressing appreciation and gratitude to His Eminence Cardinal Marc Ouellet, Archbishop of Quebec and Primate of Canada, who had been tireless in promoting and directing the Congress together with his dynamic team, comprising innumerable young volunteers, which contributed to its exceptional success. I also thank the Canadian Bishops who encouraged their faithful to participate and who came in such large numbers. I would like also to underline with appreciation the valuable and indispensable cooperation of civil authorities in the realization of this event. Several people have rightly noted the

remarkable quality of the organization, the handling of logistics, the accommodations and the fraternal and joyful welcome of participants from all over the world. I sincerely believe that these elements, together with the unity of the faith and the participation of a great number of the faithful in the course of the entire week, contributed to making this event a great success.

3. The International Eucharistic Congress and the Theological Symposium that preceded it have permitted a reflection and, hopefully, a rediscovery of the central meaning of the Eucharist in the Christian life. The Eucharist is not a simple ritual gesture, as we know: it is the presence of the living Lord, the communion with Christ, the memorial of his mystery and the gift of himself for the life of the world, the seed of the transformation of lives both personally and communally. The catechesis, the testimonies, the fraternal exchanges both formal and informal, the diverse liturgical celebrations, the moments of silent adoration, these illustrate the diverse facets of the Eucharist and its existential impact. It was truly a “*Statio Orbis*”, a gathering together of the entire Church from throughout the world, around the Lord.

4. From this beautiful mosaic of the Eucharist that was the Congress in Quebec, several pieces of it seem to me to be of particular value. I think of the ordination of twelve priests on Friday, June 20. In a context where the figure of the priest is often presented under a cloud, “the tree that falls is noisier than the forest that grows,” it was moving to see these young people give themselves to the Lord and to his Church, in a contagious enthusiasm, with an assembly that was, also, entirely enthusiastic! These new buds feed our hope of a renewed spring, and make a small dream come to reality!

5. Also the procession through the streets of Quebec was another powerful moment of the Congress. To see a crowd processing together, peaceful and joyful, accompanying the Eucharist, enables one to enter the mystery of the Church, the People of God, gathered together as the result of a call of the Lord, and offering him to the world as “the way, the truth and the life”. (John 14:6).

6. The Congress equally allowed a more concrete manifestation of the *catholic* dimension in the original sense of the term, that is to say, *universal* nature of the Church: of people coming from everywhere, expressing the same faith in different languages and different cultures, joined together in

communion by the same mystery, in the charity of Christ who calls and unites. “*How beautiful it is when brethren dwell in unity.*”

7. The Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, had wished to be symbolically present by means of his personal envoy and legate, His Eminence Cardinal Josef Tomko, as also by the gift of a pastoral staff, an audio-visual message to young people, and by means of the homily he delivered direct from Rome at the closing Mass of the Congress.

8. Permit me to recall some of the words of the Holy Father on this occasion. He recalled that the “*Eucharist is our most beautiful treasure... it is the source and summit of the action and life of the Church.*” The faithful observance of the liturgical norms in the celebration of the sacraments is also a sign of fidelity and communion with the faith of the Church. The Pope invited, as a consequence, “*to become ever more deeply aware of the importance of the Sunday Eucharist, because Sunday, the first day of the week, is the day when we honour Christ, the day when we receive the strength to live each day the gift of God.*” Then he turned his attention toward the saints, in particular those who played such an important role in the history of Canada, and who found in the Eucharist the source of their heroic strength and their witness of faith and love: “*Learn from them and, like them, be fearless; God accompanies and protects you; every day make an offering for the glory of God the Father and play your part in the construction of the world, proudly remembering your religious heritage and its social and cultural outreach, and taking care to spread around you the moral and spiritual values that come to us from the Lord.*”

9. In this framework which unites inextricably the love of God and neighbour, the Eucharistic Congress also had a social fruit: the *Cardinal Ouellet Foundation* supports agencies to help immigrants and refugees, ever more numerous in Canada. Such an option reveals the profound vocation of the Gospel: one adores Jesus in the Eucharist and recognizes, as he himself demands, his presence *in the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick and the imprisoned* (Matthew 25:44) “*for insofar as you did this to the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me.*” (Matthew 25:41). Also, the commencement of the cause for the beatification of Mother Julienne of the Rosary, foundress of the *Dominicaines Missionnaires Adoratrices* and a fervent promoter of the Eucharistic life, is a sign that the Lord continues to bless this land already so full of holiness.

10. The Congress took place during the celebrations marking the 400th anniversary of the founding of Quebec City. From this city, the Church spread throughout North America. The figures of the saints that stand out in this period (Bishops, priests, religious Sisters, laity, First Nations, Christian parents) are still lights in the history of the Church that illuminate the sky, amid the clouds that often mark our times.

11. Another major ecclesial event that has received the attention of the Church in 2008 was World Youth Day celebrated this past July in Sydney, Australia. A delegation of 2000 young Canadians, together with a score of Bishops, including a notable presence of young people from different cultural communities in Canada, reveal the interest and enthusiasm as well as the depth of their commitment of faith. Through the sharing of their experiences and their joyful enthusiasm, they often become apostles among their friends. It seems to me that this is a most beneficial, contagious influence, and one that is always growing, a fruit of World Youth Day in Toronto.

12. The merits of World Youth Day are always more evident as the time passes. The young people who participated there live a strong spiritual experience that leaves its mark. In an exchange with priests this past August 6 to which I shall return later, Pope Benedict XVI emphasized its positive impact: *“For Australians too, it was an important experience. At first they looked at this World Youth Day with great scepticism ... However, in the end – as we also saw in the media whose prejudices crumbled, bit by bit – everyone felt involved in this atmosphere of joy and faith; they saw that young people come and do not create problems of security or of any other kind but can be together joyfully. They saw that faith today is a force that is present, a force that can give people the right orientation.”* This applies also to Toronto World Youth Day. It is precisely this witness that young people wish to give by their faith: a reality that transforms their lives. *“If we live with Christ,”* continued the Pope, *“we will also succeed in human things. Indeed, faith does not only involve a supernatural aspect, it rebuilds man, bringing him back to his humanity ... it is based precisely on the natural virtues: honesty, joy, the willingness to listen to one’s neighbour, the ability to forgive, generosity, goodness and cordiality among people... our eyes are opened to seek our personal skills, to assume the corresponding initiatives and to be able to imbue others with the courage to do the same.”*

13. On June 28 past, the Pope solemnly opened a Year devoted to the figure of Saint Paul. He wished *“to establish this special ‘Pauline Year’ in order to listen to him and learn today from him, as our teacher, ‘the faith and the truth’ in which the reasons for unity among Christ’s disciples are rooted.”* He initiated the “Year” at the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside-the-Walls, lighting a flame and inaugurating the “Pauline Door” through which he entered, accompanied by the others including the Patriarch of Constantinople.

14. In the homily that he gave on this occasion, Benedict XVI recalled three passages that were expressive of the Pauline experience. One was the personal profession of faith by the Apostle: *“I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me”* (Galatians 2:20); another was the ecclesial dimension of his encounter with Christ: *“I am Jesus whom you are persecuting”* (Acts 9:4); the third, a knowledge of the difficulties of evangelization: *“With the strength that comes from God, bear your share of hardship which the Gospel entails”* (2 Timothy 1:8). With his usual wisdom, the Holy Father recalled how these essential perspectives are relevant even today.

15. Part of your meeting this week will be devoted to reflection on the Pauline Year. Two conferences tomorrow will offer you opportunity for a more profound exploration of the richness of the teaching of the Apostle to the Gentiles. All of this constitutes an excellent preamble to the Synod this October on the Word of God, for which Saint Paul is the unmatched herald for all ages. The texts of the interventions of the delegates of this Conference to the Synod are brought to your attention.

16. Allow me now to recall some significant anniversaries that may be of personal and ecclesial value. The year 1978 was often presented as the “Year of the Three Popes” with the passing of Pope Paul VI and Pope John Paul I and the election of Pope John Paul II. I beg your indulgence if I pause for a moment to reflect on the figure of Paul VI: I come from the same diocese and it is, in a certain way, on his account, that I find myself today in a service that was not in my mind when I entered the priesthood. Several of us here were ordained priests at the time of his pontificate.

17. Taking the name of the Apostle to the Gentiles, he completed the Council initiated by his predecessor, Blessed John XXIII, particularly in the reform of the liturgy and the Roman Curia. Paul VI was passionate about

Christ and the Church, and exercised in a time of social and ecclesiastical change a prophetic magisterium. I recall in this context some of these texts: his first and programmatic encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*, the Credo of the People of God at the conclusion of the 1968 Year of Faith; the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*; the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, this latter celebrates its fortieth anniversary this year and has had an extraordinary impact. The Pope courageously defended the value of human life and the dangers predicted, alas, have revealed their deleterious effects! Paul VI was the prophet of a “civilization of love”; his famous “War, Never Again!” speech at the United Nations in 1965 still rings in our ears as a loud call which seems sometimes to echo in the desert of hearts, closed by selfishness and violence. He marked his ministry as the Successor of Peter with several powerful and significant gestures, initiatives and symbolic actions. I recall his giving up of the use of the papal tiara, his apostolic journeys to five continents, his visit to Jerusalem while the Council was in session (the first visit since Saint Peter), the institution of the January 1 World Day of Peace, his brotherly embrace and kiss of peace to the Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras, and his kneeling to kiss the feet of an Orthodox Metropolitan.

18. In a letter which he addressed to the Bishop of Brescia on July 26 past, for a commemorative Mass at the beginning of September in which I had the honour of participating, Benedict XVI wrote of this great Pontiff: *“He was called by divine Providence to guide the Church through a historical period marked by numerous challenges and problems. His name is linked mainly with the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council. With time it is becoming ever more obvious to the Church and to the world the importance of his pontificate, as also the invaluable heritage of teaching and virtue he has left to believers and to all mankind.”* The Pope concluded his letter: *“In recalling his pious death, I thank the Lord for having given the Church such a Pastor, a faithful witness of Christ the Lord, sincerely and deeply in love with the Church and so close to the expectations and hopes of the men of his time, wishing strongly that each member of the People of God know and honour his memory with the commitment to a sincere and constant search for the truth.”*

19. October of 2008 also recalls the 50th anniversary of the death of Pope Pius XII, a great figure of the papacy (1939-1958), a singular master of doctrine, tireless worker of the Gospel. Despite the detractors who seek to tarnish his image, if appreciated in his time and rightly so, his teaching has inspired much of the Second Vatican Council. Benedict XVI will celebrate

a Mass to mark the anniversary of the death of the Servant of God on October 9. In the temptation of a selective memory of the history of the Church, this recollection of the great personalities who have guided the Church with extraordinary intelligence, strength and virtue, will help us to rediscover the value of tradition, the patrimony of faith, and the legacy transmitted to us by those who have preceded us and for whom we must revive our sentiments of gratitude.

20. I would now like to dwell on one particular aspect of the Petrine ministry that Pope Benedict XVI carries out with intelligence, clarity and precision: his constant desire to support the priests in their ministry. In this regard, the teaching he delivered during the course of his pastoral visit to the United States this past April contains a richness which can be shared beyond its borders, since a number of the elements that are characteristic of the Church there are also common to the Church throughout North America.

21. In the course of his speech to the Bishops on April 16, after having raised the subtle influences of secularism and materialism, the Pope recalled the Christocentric direction of our action: *“The goal of all our pastoral and catechetical work, the object of our preaching, and the focus of our sacramental ministry should be to help people establish and nurture that living relationship with ‘Jesus Christ, our hope’”* (1 Timothy 1:1). To priests, men and women Religious, and seminarians gathered in Saint Patrick’s Cathedral on April 19 he proposed a “theophanic” existence. Taking inspiration from the stained glass windows of the cathedral, he commented as follows: *“From the outside, these windows are dark, heavy, even dreary. But once one enters the church, they suddenly come alive, reflecting the light passing through them, they reveal all their splendour.... It is only from the inside, from the experience of faith and ecclesial life, that we see the Church as she truly is: flooded with grace, resplendent in beauty, adorned by the manifold gifts of the Spirit. It follows that we, who live the life of grace within the Church’s communion, are called to draw all people into this mystery of light.”* There is here an invitation to become transparent to God, thanks to a *“constant conversion and a commitment to acquiring ‘a fresh, spiritual way of thinking’”* (Ephesians 4:23). *“Is not this ongoing ‘intellectual’ conversion as necessary as ‘moral’ conversion for our own growth in faith, our discernment of the signs of the times, and our personal contribution to the Church’s life and mission?”*

22. In his solicitude for priests the Holy Father often takes time to have fraternal dialogue with them. I noted last year that he makes time for these exchanges especially during the course of his vacations. This year again, he met with the clergy of Bolzano-Bressanone on August 6. It is worthwhile to hear these words and reflect upon them. The questions posed by priests are diverse and well reflect the different ministries they carry out. I admire the simplicity of the Pope who said on that occasion: *“I cannot give an infallible answer at this moment. I can only respond according to what I see.”*

23. To a seminarian who asked about a follow-up to World Youth Day, the Pope proposed *“a life with Christ in the Holy Spirit, in the Word of God, and in the communion of the Church, in her living community”* with a structured day and based on living the natural virtues. To a priest educator who referred to his famous speech at Regensburg, where the Pope recalled the substantial link between the divine Spirit and human reason, he emphasized the aesthetic dimension of the faith. Pope Benedict made reference to the beauty that was the origin of the cathedrals and of great music: *“Wherever such things are born, the Truth is there. Without an intuition that discovers the true creative center of the world such beauty cannot be born.”* With a disabled priest, he recalled the fruitfulness of the second part of the life of Pope John Paul II, physically diminished but ever more radiant. With another, he touched upon the question of the protection of the environment, illuminated by the union between Creation and Redemption.

24. A priest, pastor of several parishes, raised the daily difficulties that he meets in his “pastoral unit”: *“the intense pressure of work, the lack of recognition, difficulties concerning the Magisterium, loneliness, the dwindling number of priests but also of communities of the faithful.”* The Pope then recalled the irreplaceable nature of the priesthood and the multiplicity of charisms: *“it is important to have the courage to limit oneself and to be clear about deciding on priorities. A fundamental priority of priestly life is to be with the Lord and thus to have time for prayer.... And to order priorities on this basis: I must learn to see what is truly essential, where my presence as a priest is indispensable and where I cannot delegate anyone else... knowing how to delegate, to get people to collaborate.”*

25. Finally, a priest posed a question concerning the sacraments, particularly regarding First Communion for which there is little follow-up for many. The Pope freely confided: *“When I was younger I was rather*

severe. I said: the sacraments are sacraments of faith, and where faith does not exist, where the practice of faith does not exist, the Sacrament cannot be conferred either.... Then I too, with time, came to realize that we must follow, rather, the example of the Lord, who was very open even with people on the margins of Israel at the time... if we can still see a little flame of desire for communion in the faith, a desire even in these children who want to enter into communion with Jesus, it seems to me that it is right to be rather broad-minded... the pedagogy of faith is always a journey and we must accept today's situations. Yet we must also open them more... so that... their hearts have truly been touched."

26. Thus, the situations faced by priests today are not unknown to the Pope; his analysis and the responses that he offers manifest evangelical inspiration, an understanding of people, courage and a seeking of the truth. I would not wish to forget the rich teaching which he gives during the course of his Wednesday Audiences which trace a portrait of the great figures of ecclesial life and, in particular, the Fathers of the Church, and again, his Angelus talks where he comments on the Sunday Gospel.

27. Having considered the great themes in the teaching of the Holy Father, I turn to the intense pastoral work that is the object of your ministry. In order to respond to the current situation, your Conference has made a significant modification of its structures with three national commissions (Doctrine, Social Affairs and relations with other ecclesial groups), and regional committees. The concern for immigrants and the place of indigenous peoples has also received your attention. In his speech during the course of his welcome in Sydney, the Pope spoke these appropriate words: *"Rightly, you are seeking to close the gap between indigenous and non-indigenous regarding life expectancy, educational achievement and economic opportunity! This example of reconciliation offers hope to peoples all over the world who long to see their rights affirmed and their contribution to society acknowledged and promoted"* (17 July 2008). Closer ties with the First Nations, including some representatives who have been here among you today, serves to contribute effectively to the building of a spirit of harmony, faith and cooperation in the life of the Church as well as society.

28. Among your pastoral messages, one on the Sacrament of Marriage affects a fundamental reality for the future of the Church as for society. You have also had a concern for interreligious dialogue which is all the more urgent given the increase in the number of immigrants from countries and

places of different cultures and religions. You have also offered the faithful points of reflection to assist them in their discernment in preparation for the federal election. With the decline in personnel as well as economic resources, your dioceses are studying stages of restructuring and pastoral realignments. I know that the decisions imposed in actual circumstances are often accompanied by misunderstanding and resistance, motivated by the understandable ties of history and affections and, sometimes, reactions not always in the spirit of ecclesial communion. The sound of some discontent arrives also at the Apostolic Nunciature, which, in its responses, invites always frank and respectful dialogue with legitimate diocesan authorities.

29. Concern for evangelization remains fundamental. Conditions have changed: in the schools of Quebec, denominational religious education comes to an end this year, replaced by the teaching of the culture of religion. The Bishops have introduced a “Catechesis Sunday” which was celebrated throughout Quebec yesterday. It is hoped that parents will better understand that the transmission of the faith to their children remains an essential priority of their mission. The resources that the Church can offer in this regard are diverse both in terms of personnel as well as institutes: their colleges, Catholic universities and canonical faculties have a crucial contribution that must accompany and enhance this endeavour.

30. Catholic education in the milieu of schools, as found throughout this country, varies according to regions and legislation that regulates them. *“Education is integral to the mission of the Church to proclaim the Good News.”* So said the Pope in Washington on April 17 past. Thankfully, many and well regarded Catholic schools still exist in this country. Their duty is defined by the Holy Father by two emblematic expressions which clearly explain his reasoning: *“diakonia of truth”* and *“intellectual charity”*. The Pope continued: *“The Church’s primary mission of evangelization, in which educational institutions play a crucial role, is consonant with a nation’s fundamental aspiration to develop a society truly worthy of the human person’s dignity.”* I think that the words of the Holy Father in this regard can just as equally be applied to the Canadian context: *“I wish also to express a particular word of encouragement to both lay and Religious teachers of catechesis who strive to ensure that young people become daily more appreciative of the gift of faith. Religious education is a challenging apostolate, yet there are many signs of a desire among young people to learn about the faith and practise it with vigour. If this awakening is to grow, teachers require a clear and precise understanding of the specific*

nature and role of Catholic education. They must also be ready to lead the commitment made by the entire school community to assist our young people, and their families, to experience the harmony between faith, life and culture.”

31. Dear brother Bishops, I thank you for your patience in listening to me up to this moment. At the same time, in the name of the secretaries who collaborate with me in the work of the Apostolic Nunciature, I wish to express my sincere gratitude for the spirit of fraternal confidence and, if you allow me, for the signs of friendship, of appreciation and communion which I often receive and which give me one more reason to thank the Lord and the Holy Father for having called me to accompany and share the life of the Church in Canada. I would like here to express publicly the sentiments which support the exercise of my service: the love for this Church, which I also feel as deeply mine, not only for the mission which has been given to me, but also for the esteem and profound appreciation for all the good work realized and for the gestures of generosity and faith of the Bishops, priests, Religious and lay faithful. The difficulties, problems, sufferings and challenges are many; Saint Paul invited Timothy to take his “*share in the sufferings for the proclamation of the gospel*” (2 Timothy 1:8). Saint Augustine, in this respect, offers us a precious teaching: “*I feel as though I was tossed by storms on a great ocean. When I remember by whose blood I have been redeemed, this thought brings me peace, as though I were entering the safety of a harbour; and I am consoled, as I carry out the arduous duties of my own particular office, by the blessing which we all have in common*” (Sermon 340: anniversary of priestly ordination).

32. Finally, I thank Archbishop James Weisgerber, President of the Conference, for his kind words which he addressed to me at the beginning. I express my best wishes for your Plenary Assembly and for the beginning of this pastoral year, and will accompany your work with my prayers.