

U.S. Bishops

From 5A

"To build up the Church as the Body of Christ, and to remain united to it by your link, with the Order of Bishops, under the authority of the Successor of Saint Peter the Apostle;

"To show kindness and compassion in the name of the Lord to the poor and to

strangers and to all who are in need;

"To seek out the sheep who stray and to gather them into the fold of the Lord;

"To pray without ceasing for the people of God, to carry out the highest duties of the priesthood in such a way as to afford no grounds for reproof."

This then is the edifying witness of a bishop, an American bishop, to the episcopal ministry of holiness and truth. These words are a credit to him and a credit to all of you.

A challenge for our age and for every age in the Church is to bring the message of the Gospel to the very core of our people's lives

so that they may live the full truth of their humanity, their Redemption and their adoption in Jesus Christ - that they may be enriched with "the justice and holiness of truth."

In the exercise of your ministry of truth, as Bishops of the United States you have through statements and pastoral letters, collectively offered the word of God to your people, showing its relevance to daily life, pointing to the power it has to uplift and heal, and at the same time upholding its inherent demands. Three years ago you did this in a very special way through your Pastoral Letter, so beautifully entitled "To Live in Christ Jesus." This letter, in which you offered your people the service of truth, contains a number of points to which I wish to allude today. With compassion, understanding and love, you transmitted a message that is linked to Revelation and to the mystery of faith. And so with great pastoral charity you spoke of God's love, of humanity and of sin - and of the meaning of Redemption and of life in Christ. You spoke of the word of Christ as it affects individuals, the family, the community and nations. You spoke of justice and peace, of charity, of truth and friendship. And you spoke of some special questions affecting the moral life of Christians: the moral life in both its individual and social aspects.

same conviction of Paul VI, ratify the teaching of this encyclical, which was put forth by my predecessor "by virtue of the mandate entrusted to us by Christ."

In portraying the sexual union between husband and

housing, education, health care, employment, and the administration of justice, you gave further witness to the fact that all aspects of human life are sacred. You were, in effect, proclaiming that the Church will never abandon man, nor his temporal needs,

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The pontiff and the bishops in Chicago. Photo courtesy of the Democrat and Chronicle.

wife as a special expression of their covenanted love, you rightly stated: "Sexual intercourse is a moral and human good only within marriage, outside marriage it is wrong."

As "men with the message of truth and the power of God," as authentic teachers of God's law and as compassionate pastors you also rightly stated: "Homosexual activity... as distinguished from homosexual orientation, is morally wrong." In the clarity of this truth, you exemplified the real charity of Christ; you did not betray those people who, because of homosexuality, are confronted with difficult moral problems, as would have happened if, in the name of understanding and compassion, or for any other reason, you had held out false hope to any brother or sister. Rather, by your witness to the truth of humanity in God's plan, you effectively manifested fraternal love, upholding the true dignity, the true human dignity, of those who look to Christ's Church for the guidance which comes from the light of God's word.

You also gave witness to the truth, thereby serving all

as she leads humanity to salvation and eternal life. And because the Church's greatest act of fidelity to humanity and her "fundamental function in every age and particularly in ours is to direct man's gaze, to point the awareness and experience of the whole of humanity toward the mystery of God." Because of this you rightly alluded to the dimension of eternal life. It is indeed in this proclamation of eternal life that we hold up a great motive of hope for our people. Against the onslaughts of materialism, against rampant secularism and against moral permissiveness.

A sense of pastoral responsibility has also been genuinely expressed by individual bishops in their ministry as local pastors. To the great credit of their authors I would cite but two recent examples of Pastoral Letters issued in the United States. Both are examples of responsible pastoral initiatives. One of them deals with the issue of racism and vigorously denounces it. The other refers to homosexuality and deals with the issue, as should be done, with clarity and great pastoral charity, thus rendering a real service to truth and to those who are seeking this liberating truth.

Brothers in Christ: as we proclaim the truth in love, it is not possible for us to avoid all criticism; nor is it possible to please everyone. But it is possible to work for the real benefit of everyone. And so we are humbly convinced that God is with us in our ministry of truth, and that he "did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and self-control."

One of the greatest rights of the faithful is to receive the word of God in its purity and integrity as guaranteed by the Magisterium of the universal Church; the authentic Magisterium of the Bishops of the Catholic Church teaching in union with the Pope. Dear Brothers: we can be assured that the Holy Spirit is assisting us in our teaching if we remain absolutely faithful to the universal Magisterium.

In this regard I wish to add an extremely important point which I recently emphasized in speaking to a group of Bishops making their ad limina visit. "In the community of the faithful - which must always maintain

You spoke explicitly of the Church's duty to be faithful to the mission entrusted to her. And precisely for this reason you spoke of certain issues that needed a clear affirmation, because Catholic teaching in their regard had been challenged, denied, or in practice violated. You repeatedly proclaimed human rights and human dignity and the incomparable worth of people of every racial and ethnic origin, declaring that "racial antagonism and discrimination are among the most persistent and destructive evils of our nation." You forcefully

'The people need to have bishops whom they can look upon as leaders in the quest for holiness...'

rejected the oppression of the weak, the manipulation of the vulnerable, the waste of goods and resources, the ceaseless preparations for war, unjust social structures and policies, and all crimes by and against individuals and against creation.

With the candor of the Gospels, the compassion of pastors and the charity of Christ, you faced the question of the indissolubility of marriage, rightly stating: "The covenant between a man and a woman joined in Christian marriage is an indissoluble and irrevocable as God's love for his people and Christ's love for his Church."

In exalting the beauty of marriage you rightly spoke against both the ideology of contraception and contraceptive acts, as did the Encyclical Humanae Vitae. And I myself today with the

humanity, when, echoing the teaching of the Council - "From the moment of conception life must be guarded with the greatest care," you reaffirmed the right to life and the inviolability of every human life, including the life of unborn children. You clearly said: "To destroy these innocent unborn children is an unspeakable crime... Their right to life must be recognized and fully protected by the law."

And just as you defended the unborn in the truth of their being, so also you clearly spoke up for the aged, asserting: "Euthanasia or mercy killing... is a grave moral evil... Such killing is incompatible with respect for human dignity and reverence for life."

And in your pastoral interest for your people in all their needs - including

Address at White House

Following the welcoming address by President Jimmy Carter, Pope John Paul II, on his arrival at the White House, delivered the following address.

Mr. President, I wish to express my most sincere thanks for your kind words of welcome to the White House.

It is indeed a great honor for me to meet with the President of the United States during a visit of which the aims are spiritual and religious in nature.

May I convey at the same time to you, and through you to all your fellow Americans, my profound respect for all the Federal and state authorities of this nation and for its beloved people. In the course of the last few days, I have had the opportunity to see some of your cities and rural areas. My only regret is that time is too short to bring my greetings personally to all parts of this country.

But I want to assure you that my esteem and affection go out to every man, woman and child without distinction.

Divine providence, in its own designs, has called me from my native Poland to be a successor of Peter in the See of Rome, and the leader of the Catholic Church. It gives me great joy to be the first Pope in history to come to the capital of this nation. And I thank Almighty God for this blessing.

In accepting your courteous invitation, Mr. President, I have also hoped that our meeting today would serve the cause of

world peace, international understanding and the promotion of full respect for human rights everywhere.

Mr. Speaker and honorable members of Congress, distinguished members of the Cabinet and of the judiciary, ladies and gentlemen: Your presence here honors me greatly, and I deeply appreciate the expression of respect which you thus extend to me.

My gratitude goes to each one of you personally for your kind welcome. And to all, I wish to say how profoundly I esteem your mission as stewards of the common good of all the people of America.

I come from a nation with a long tradition of deep Christian faith, and with a national history marked by many upheavals. For more than 100 years, Poland was even erased from the political map of Europe. But it is also a country marked by deep veneration for those values without which no society can prosper - love of freedom, cultural creativity, and a conviction that common endeavors for the good of society must be guided by a true moral sense. My own spiritual and religious mission impels me to be the messenger of peace and brotherhood and to witness to the true greatness of every human person.

This greatness derives from the love of God who created us in his own likeness and gave us an eternal destiny. It is in this dignity of the human person that I see the meaning of history and that I find the principle that gives sense to the role which every human

being has to assume for his or her own advancement and for the well being of the society to which he or she belongs.

It is with these sentiments that I greet you, the whole American people, a people that bases its concept of life on spiritual and moral values on a deep religious sense of respect for duty and on generosity in the service of humanity - noble traits which are embodied in a particular way in the nation's capital with its monuments dedicated to such outstanding national figures as George Washington, Abraham Lincoln and Thomas Jefferson.

I greet the American people in their elected representatives, all of you who serve in Congress to chart through legislation the path that will lead every citizen of this country towards the fullest development of his or her potential and the nation as a whole towards assuming its share of the responsibility for building a world of freedom and justice.

I greet America in all who are vested with authority which can only be seen as an opportunity for serving our fellow citizens and in the overall development of their true humanity and in the full and unimpeded enjoyment of all their fundamental rights. I salute the people of this land also in the members of the judiciary who are servants of humanity in the application of justice and who thus hold in their hands the awesome power of profoundly affecting the lives of every individual.