

**Address of the Apostolic Nuncio Archbishop Luigi Bonazzi  
Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Quebec  
(Trois-Rivières, March 11, 2014)**

My dear brother bishops,

I am pleased to participate in your meeting and to fraternally greet each one of you. I am grateful to the Lord for the opportunities available to me at the beginning of my service as Apostolic Nuncio in this country, to meet the pastors of the Church in Canada. Two weeks ago I had the occasion to experience a brotherly moment with a number of bishops, on the occasion of the celebration held to welcome our new Cardinal, His Eminence, Gérald Cyprien Lacroix, Archbishop of Québec. And now, at the beginning of your Episcopal Assembly, I am fortunate to experience a moment of communion with you, the Bishops of Québec.

I must admit that participating in the celebration in honor of Cardinal Lacroix was, for me, a powerful and significant moment. That evening, at the *Pavillon de la Jeunesse*, I had the strong experience of finding myself among the people, to see a Pastor who walks with his people. It is precisely because “we are among our faithful”, and because “we walk together with our people” that we can also “lead our people”, as guides and pastors, always trusting in the grace of the Episcopal charism that the Lord has given us.

In Québec, at the *Pavillon de la Jeunesse*, I also had another experience. Being with you, listening to you, watching you, I personally felt what Archbishop Lacroix experienced during his first meeting with the Cardinals in Rome: I felt myself small, the smallest among you, without, however, apprehension. On the contrary, I felt happy to be among giants, in the fulfillment of the service that as representative of the Pope I am called to offer.

Wishing to give a name and a more precise content to this service, I recalled the words of Pope Paul VI in his Motu proprio *Sollicitudo Ecclesiarum omnium*, in which he describes the specific ministry of Papal Representatives. Pope Paul wrote:

The activity of the Papal Representative brings, in the first place, an invaluable service to the Bishops, Priests, Religious and all the Catholics of the place, who find in him support and protection, because he represents a higher authority which is for the benefit of all. His mission does not overlap the exercise of the powers of bishops, nor replaces or hinders it. On the contrary, he encourages it with fraternal and discreet advice. (*June 24, 1969*)

I interpret the words “represents a higher authority” in the same manner as in the Church the authority is interpreted and exercised, namely as a service, which being a “higher service” demands to take the lowest place. I do not know how I will be able to perform this service, but my sincere interior disposition is as follows: to welcome and to listen, to share, to draw close to all, especially to those experiencing the fatigue of the day and the weight of the ministry.

I particularly desire to be close to you, the Pastors of the Church in Canada, but also - praying, thinking and working with you - to be close to all the members of the Body of Christ in Canada: priests, seminarians, candidates for the priesthood, the permanent deacons, men and women religious, the faithful in their various vocations, ecclesial movements and associations old and new, that enrich the fabric of the Church. Being well aware of my own limitations and poverty, I trust nevertheless that the Lord will help me to carry out my task well. I ask you to help me. I need your prayers, your advice, even your fraternal correction of which I thank you since now, so that I may avoid mistakes along the way and accomplish what is good in a good way.

I must confess that even though it is more than a month since I landed at the Ottawa Airport, I still feel as though I am at the stage of the "approach to landing" in this vast sea, rather this ocean that is your beloved country. We know that to make a good landing one must have a crucial liaison with the "control tower." For the Church, and for us Bishops, the "control tower" is the Holy Spirit, and specifically what the Holy Spirit says to the Church. So like you do, I try to listen to what the Spirit is saying to the Church today. Indeed, the Holy Spirit speaks and continues to break through, to enlighten with his light full of love the darkness of doubts, worldliness, economic and social problems, trials of all kinds that affect the world and weary the Church.

I would like to share with you one of these lights, which is of particular help to me in this moment when I begin to look with affection on the situation of the Catholic Church in Canada. It is the prophetic vision of the Church as it prepares to enter into the Third Millennium, which was bequeathed to us by Blessed (soon to be Saint) Pope John Paul II in what I like to consider as his spiritual testament: the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*. In this Letter, Pope John Paul contemplates the Church entering in the Third Millennium in the light of Chapter 5, verses 4-6, of the Gospel of St. Luke, which relates the miraculous catch of fish. The context is one of a restless night of heavy, heavy labor, resulting in failure. "We have fished all night but have caught nothing."

It is in the context of this distressing turn of events that the words of Jesus to Peter resound, "Put out into deep water and let down your nets for a catch." Peter believes, and based on the words of Jesus, casts his nets.

The Church has always and will continue to move forward, as St. Augustine writes in *De civitate Dei* (his theology of history), "between the persecutions of the world and the consolations of God." It is not surprising, therefore, if our day comes to us under the sign of uncertainty which is responsible for problems and threats which might lead to discouragement and to the decision to abandon everything, bringing the oars back into the boat. This is precisely the moment of turning our gaze to Christ, of hearing his word and of building upon that word: there is indeed a miraculous catch, that is there before us!

The "miraculous catch" is both a promise and a responsibility. Far from being marked by nostalgia or by a look to the past, the times in which we live throw open for us the great responsibilities that await us, the joyful adventure to let down the nets for a catch, experiencing as and even more than in the past two millennia, the power of the Word of God. We are called to start again from God and his Word, to stake our lives upon that Word, both as individuals and as

a Church: “at your word, I will let down the nets.” (*Luke 5:5*) We are confident that the Lord will astonish us once again with his faithfulness and surprises!

We are thus invited, ever and again, to fix our eyes upon Him who is the beginning, the way and the endpoint of history: Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of Man. Pope John Paul II forcefully asserts this: to the question “What must we do” (cf. Acts 2:37) the Pope answers in *Novo Millennio Ineunte*:

We put the question with trusting optimism, but without underestimating the problems we face. We are certainly not seduced by the naïve expectation that faced with the great challenges of our times we shall find some magic formula. No, we shall not be saved by a formula, but by a Person, with the assurance which he gives us: I am with you! It is not therefore a matter of inventing a “new program”. The program already exists: it is the plan found in the Gospel and in the living Tradition, it is the same as ever. Ultimately it has as its centre, Christ himself, who is to be known, loved and imitated, so that in him we may live the life of the Trinity, and with him transform history until its fulfillment in the heavenly Jerusalem. (*N. 29*)

If each day we strive to know Jesus Christ, to love him, to imitate him, and live in his Trinitarian Life, we can be certain, that just as he made known his call and mission to Peter after the confession at Caesarea Philippi (cf. Mt. 16:17-19), in the same way the Lord will show to us his Pastors, the surest way to go daily, the route to follow, the initiatives to be taken, in order to bring to our faithful, his peace, his forgiveness, his joy!

The challenge then is to trust in the Lord’s promise and to let down the nets into deeper waters. I would like to mention in a special way the “net of vocations.” We need priestly and religious vocations, we need baptized who are ever more in love with Christ and committed to following him; we need young people who return to discover the face of Christ, assisted by our living and contagious faith, not hampered by counter-witnesses.

“Let down the nets”: in times of consolation as in times of trial, both day and night. Of course, sometimes we would like to be more relaxed, without the anxiety of some ongoing problem. However, if this is the situation in which the Lord calls us to live and is what he wills, then we wish it also. Furthermore, we thank the Lord because precisely in this time he has called us to be his Pastors, instruments of the salvation he desires to offer everyone.

This is exactly the joyful and luminous testimony we receive from Pope Francis. With him I also say to you: “Let us walk together behind the Lord, and let us always be called together by him, in the midst of his faithful people, the holy People of God, holy Mother the Church. (*Homily, February 22, 2014, Consistory for the Creation of New Cardinals*)

Thank you.