

Archbishop Nichols' address to the His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI

General Audience for the Bishops of England and Wales

Visit 'ad limina apostolorum'

1 February 2010

Most Holy Father,

It is my privilege and delight to address you in the name of the Bishops of England and Wales and all Catholics in our countries.

The visit 'ad limina Apostolorum' gives us a precious opportunity of thanking you personally and most warmly for the years of service you are giving to the Apostolic See as our beloved Holy Father. Nor do we forget the years in which you were Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, where you always received us with the utmost courtesy and interest.

We wish to assure you of our prayers and heartfelt support for you in the exercise of this supreme Office. We are proud of the strong tradition of profound loyalty to the Holy Father which is part of our heritage in England and Wales. It is very much a feature of our Catholic life.

We would like to take the moment to thank you in particular for your inspiring teaching in the Encyclical Letters you have issued for the whole Church. The most recent of these, 'Caritas in Veritate', has been well received in our countries and is making a significant contribution to the debate about and examination of those circumstances and conditions which lead to the recent financial crises and the world wide hardship it has caused. Your insistence on the central place of the human person, and of integral human development, is a powerful reminder that the most important truths have to shape economic and social programmes if they are to be of genuine service to the common good. First among these are, of course, the respect for life from its beginnings and the crucial role of marriage and family for the well-being not only of children but also for the good of society.

We thank you for the leadership you have given, even in recent months, on the questions of our care for the environments of our world: both the natural environment and, crucially, the human ecology necessary for our proper development. These matters are of deep concern to many in our countries, including many young people, who have accepted the invitation, in large numbers, to look closely at ways in which they can live more simply, so that others may simply live.

We thank you, too, for your constant encouragement to us through the initiatives of the Year of St Paul and the Year for Priests. In our different dioceses we have built on these invitations both in the deeper appreciation of the Word of God and of the gift of the Eucharist. At this time we appreciate your concern for the dignity and reverence with which the Mass is celebrated. This is a central part of the life of every priest and bishop and we are committed to constant effort in this regard. In particular the new translations of the Roman Missal offer us an opportune moment to deepen our appreciation of the Mass. Through catechesis we can renew our reception of the richness of the Church's faith through the ages which, in faithfulness, is now handed on to us in these texts.

Of particular delicacy for us is the response made by you, Holy Father, to those Anglicans who, from different parts of the world, asked for a pathway to be established by which they could come into the full communion of the Catholic Church bringing with them elements of

the Anglican patrimony which fully accord with Catholic faith. Years of close cooperation and deepening friendship and communion with our brothers and sisters in the Church of England have helped us to ensure that the various interpretations of and reactions to 'Anglicanorum Coetibus' have not seriously disrupted the relationships between our Ecclesial Communions. Indeed the commitment to commence a third round of discussions as part of the work of the Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission has reinforced this relationship. We remain ready to explore with those Anglicans in England and Wales who wish to take up your generous and paternal response to their requests the ways forward towards full communion. We ask for your prayers in these important and sensitive matters.

But most importantly of all, Holy Father, we wish to express our joy at the prospect of your visit to our countries. We are grateful to Her Majesty the Queen, and to her Government, for the invitation extended to you and for the manner in which preparations are being undertaken. The entire Catholic community looks forward to this much hoped-for visit and the encouragement you will give not only to us but to all our fellow citizens. There are, of course, great challenges facing the Catholic community in our land, as we strive to be faithful to the Lord in both word and deed. But there is also an openness to the things of faith, not least in a time of uncertainty and anxiety about many aspects of our society. We are confident that your presence and teaching, with its consistent and reasoned appeal to all people, will be warmly received, as will you be personally. The Beatification of the Venerable John Henry Newman, who spoke so eloquently to our English tradition and culture, is, we trust, the eagerly anticipated climax of your proposed visit.

Most Holy Father, we are honoured to be received by you today. In this visit we strive to deepen the bonds of ecclesial communion not only between the Apostolic See and the Conference of Bishops, but more importantly between the Catholic community we serve and you yourself, Holy Father. You remain a vital sign and source of our visible unity in the Lord. We thank you most profoundly for this ministry and we assure you of our unwavering loyalty and prayers. We ask of you, Holy Father, your Apostolic Blessing for ourselves and for our people.

+Vincent Nichols

Archbishop of Westminster

President of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales

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