



In Joy and Hope

by

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A visit to Rome and Pope John Paul II

Every five years, bishops from throughout the world go to Rome to meet with the Holy Father and to review with Vatican officials the life of the local church for which the bishop has a pastoral responsibility. 1993 has been the year designated for bishops of the United States to make this pilgrimage. This weekend, I will join the bishops of the Northwest, along with the bishops of the state of Texas, to fulfill this pastoral privilege and responsibility.

A visit to Rome is always an exciting opportunity, but the "ad limina" visit makes it very special. It is a time to go back to one's roots, to be in contact with one's legacy of faith, and to have the privilege to be with and speak with Pope John Paul II. Each bishop has a set time to meet individually with the Holy Father, to review with him the life of our local church, and to seek his advice and counsel. There will also be a time to join with 10 or 12 other bishops to share a meal with him, as well as to celebrate the Eucharist with him. On the two earlier occasions when I made the "ad limina" visit, it definitely was a time of grace and blessing.

What does one say to the Holy Father?

When people learn that you are going to Rome to visit with Pope John Paul II, the first question asked always is, "What do you say to him?" I know this year I will say "thank you" for the visit he made to Denver for the celebration of World Youth Day. I also plan to share with him a summary of the letters I have received from the young pilgrims who were part of World Youth Day from Western Washington. From the letters sent to me already, I know that young people want me to let the Holy Father know how much they appreciated his presence and his message to them. In a unique and magnificent way, Pope John Paul II struck a chord in the hearts and minds of young people. He asked them to appreciate the richness of the Gospel message and church teaching, and challenged them to live as disciples of Jesus. Most of all, he told them that they could make a difference.

I plan to let the Holy Father know that the Church in Western Washington is alive and well, and yet, like so many other dioceses in our country and our world, there are countless challenges. The challenges would be the need for more vocations to the priesthood, the call for all the baptized to recognize their vocation in the church, the cry for a spirituality rooted in the knowledge of our faith that will touch peoples' lives, the urgency of evangelization, the obligation we have to address human needs of poverty, unemployment, and discrimination, and to find more effective ways to support family life. These are but some of the issues I hope to raise, along with others.

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Our relationship to the universal church

What is singularly important about the "ad limina" visit is its power to remind me and the local church which I pastor as archbishop that we are not an isolated and independent community of faith. We are part of a universal church that professes a creed and celebrates its faith in a liturgy that promotes unity. Each local church in the world has its own unique challenges that we need to address in light of the legacy of faith and tradition we believe as Roman Catholics.

It is not only my responsibility to promote and protect this unity in faith and worship, it is also the responsibility of all those who share ministry in our local church. One does not minister in one's own name, but in the name of the church and Jesus Christ. At times, this may be painful and difficult. Often, it is countercultural. And yet, this is what it means to be a member of the church, a disciple of Jesus Christ.

The call to fidelity

In countless issues today, whether they are church issues, political issues, or the cry of different groups in our society, people sometimes ask, "Why don't you be prophetic and take a stand that is different from the teaching of the church?" So often, our own agenda determines what is prophetic. The far more prophetic and difficult stance at times is to be faithful to who we are and what we believe as a community of faith.

Please remember me in your prayers this week as I travel to Rome. In turn, be assured of my prayers for you as I visit the tombs of the apostles, walk the streets where martyrs shed their blood, and meet with Pope John Paul II. I look forward to letting you know what happened during my visit to Rome. May God's grace and peace be yours.