



September 2, 2004 - Remarks Archbishop O'Malley offered at the Papal Audience in Rome Ad Limina Visit

Greetings to the Holy Father

As the Pastors of Provinces of Boston and Hartford we present ourselves to you representing the 3,776,000 Catholics, 3,149 priests, 5,645 religious, and 582 deacons of New England. The first Mass was celebrated in our region in 1604 on the Island of Sainte Croix in the State of Maine. Over the centuries we have grown from a small persecuted minority into a large and vibrant community. Today we are comprised of many different ethnic groups, and we continue to welcome new immigrants.

Our recent history is one of great pain because of the tragedy of clerical sexual abuse with its all devastating consequences. As a Church we are striving to bring healing to all of those affected by this crisis. Oftentimes the victims and their families were among those most committed to the life of the Church, and so the abuse has been experienced as the most serious betrayal.

Our Catholic faith assures us that our God is so loving and powerful that He brings good out of evil. We are humbled by our sins and offenses but confident that God does not forsake us and calls us to strive for healing and reconciliation.

The pain of these recent years has certainly convinced us of the importance of prayer in our lives. As you reminded us in *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, Christians cannot survive in today's world on a superficial prayer life. All of our pastoral programs must have prayer as their foundation in order that we find the strength to carry out the mission of the Church, with humility, love and mercy.

We thank you for all that you do to confirm our faith and to lead the Church of Christ on the path of fidelity and service. Your many writings, your outreach to the youth, and your missionary journeys have inspired us all in our pastoral ministry. We are particularly grateful for your unceasing defense of human life when it is most vulnerable, the life of the unborn and of those whose lives are slipping away.

From Apostolic times the Church has sprung up around the celebration of Mass as when those first Christians came together in fellowship and prayer and for the breaking of the bread. We thank you for your encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* and the gift of a Eucharistic Year. May this time leading up to the Synod be a special grace for all Catholics and a call to renew our Eucharistic devotion, to reaffirm the centrality of Sunday Mass and to promote priestly vocations.

Finally, we commend your ministry to the loving care of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of the Good Shepherd. May she continue to watch over and protect you and obtain for you the grace and wisdom you need to serve God's people as the successor of Saint Peter.

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