

Leading the FLOCK

BY BISHOP DANIEL E. THOMAS



“A Visit Unlike Any Other”

As the Thanksgiving Season gives way to the Advent and then Christmas Seasons, it is quite common for these Seasons to be filled with familiar “holiday” visits: visits of family, friends, neighbors and co-workers. Some visits take us close to home, others require some travel. It’s a Season of visits.

In this Season, from December 8-14, I will be making a visit which is not at all common, with which many of you may not be familiar. This visit is titled in Latin the “*Visita Ad Limina Apostolorum*” or the “*Ad Limina*” Visit for short. This is literally a “visit to the threshold of the Apostles,” simply put, to the tombs of the great apostles, Peter and Paul, pastors and pillars of the Roman Catholic Church. But it is this and so much more! Every bishop throughout the world is required periodically to make an “*Ad Limina*” Visit. I will be making this “visit unlike any other” to Rome in fraternal company with all the bishops of Region VI of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, the bishops of Ohio and Michigan. It promises to be a time of grace and deepened ecclesial communion, a time of

prayer and reflection, a time to build up the Church for Christ Jesus and his Gospel of salvation for all.

The principal moments of the “*Ad Limina*” Visit are the pilgrimage to and veneration of the tombs of Saints Peter and Paul; the meeting with the Successor of Peter and Bishop of Rome, Pope Francis; and the meetings with the dicasteries/major offices of the Roman Curia, which assist the Holy Father in his governance of the universal Church. These visits “promote and foster constant communication between the particular Churches and the Apostolic See by an exchange of information and mutual sharing of pastoral concerns about problems, experiences and sufferings as well as orientations and plans for working and living” (Directory for the “*Ad Limina*” Visit, IV).

The very definite purpose of such a visit is the strengthening of the responsibility of the bishops as successors of the apostles and their hierarchical communion with the Successor of Peter and one another. Part of the preparation

for the “*Ad Limina*” Visit is the writing of a Quinquennial Report, as prescribed by the Code of Canon Law. The report customarily covers a *quinquennium* or five year time period, though the frequency may vary, from the last “*Ad Limina*” Visit through this current year. It is a “snapshot” of the pastoral and spiritual life of the diocese, sent well in advance of the visit so that the bishops may have a profitable visit with the Holy Father on a personal and pastoral level, and so that the Dicasteries of the Roman Curia can have a constructive dialogue with the diocesan Pastors regarding the pastoral situation of their dioceses. I am especially grateful for the wonderful senior staff and employees of our Pastoral Center who worked so diligently to provide all the required information, statistics and narrative to be compiled into the Report for the Diocese of Toledo, sent to Rome now six months ago!

While making such an extraordinary visit, I will be staying at the Pontifical North American College, where I had the privilege of living as an adjunct spiritual director during the fifteen years I worked in the Congregation for Bishops. In fact, as an official of that Congregation, it was my task to assist in preparing for the bishops’ “*Ad Limina*” visits, to coordinate the meetings, and to sit in on them as a translator and facilitator for the superiors and bishops. It will be quite a different experience now to visit the Congregation as Bishop of a Diocese!

In addition to the blessed opportunity to offer Mass and pray at the tombs of the Apostles, to meet with Pope Francis, and to meet with the officials of the various offices of the Roman Curia, it will be a real joy to visit with one of

our own priests, Father Tad Oxley, who works in the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and three of our own seminarians who are studying in Rome, Deacon Zach Brown, Curtis Weisenburger, and Jacob Livecchi!

During the pilgrimage to the tombs of the apostles, in the Masses and prayers at the other holy places of pilgrimage, please be assured of an intentional remembrance in prayer for you and for each person in our diocese, all our lay men and women, all our consecrated religious, all our seminarians, all our deacons and all our priests. Know that I will be praying, as we do throughout the Diocese every Sunday, that the Lord may grant us the grace to foster holy disciples, holy families and holy vocations, so as to become a more holy diocese of Toledo!

While making this visit to Rome, I promise to bring with me all your intentions; I promise to bring to our Holy Father, Pope Francis, your pledge of love and prayers; I promise to bring our priest and seminarians your warm regards and support; and I promise to keep each one of you in my heart, mind and soul throughout the “*Ad Limina*” Visit.

In the midst of this Season of visits, please pray with me, that as I make this “visit unlike any other,” it may bear much fruit and hold many spiritual and pastoral blessings for our diocese, for your bishop and for all God’s holy people!



Most Rev. Daniel E. Thomas
Bishop of Toledo
December 1, 2019