

## **A Word of Thanks**

By Bishop Victor Galeone

*My dear friends in Christ,*

There are a number of things that I would like to talk about in this, my first official letter to you. However, a lack of space will limit me to treat just three of them.

First, I want to express my heartfelt thanks for the warm reception you gave me even before the day that I arrived. A note that I received from a brother priest in Baltimore said it best. He wrote: "Just a short note of profound thanks for the most awesome Southern hospitality from your diocesan staff and your people during your ordination ceremony." To which I add my own hearty "Amen!"

Next, we are still reeling from the tragic events of September 11. Some have vowed never to fly again. Others wonder if they can truly forgive the perpetrators of such hatred. I would like to remind you that after the Titanic sank in April of 1912, some folks said they would never board an ocean liner again. But their resolve was short-lived. And by harboring bitterness and hatred in our hearts towards anyone, we wind up the losers. Jesus tells us: "If you do not forgive others when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will not forgive you either." That is not to say that we are not to bring the guilty parties to justice. Forgiveness and justice are compatible. The would-be assassin of Pope John Paul II was captured, tired and imprisoned. Still, that did not prevent the Holy Father from visiting him in his prison cell to tell him, "I forgive you."

Some good has resulted from the leveling of the World Trade Center. There was a reawakening of the important values in life. Church attendance has increased dramatically. "God Bless America" signs are everywhere. And many are beginning to reexamine the grip that materialism has on us. That's the theme that the pope asked the bishops to scrutinize closely as they met in Rome in October.

In the opening Mass for the Synod of Bishops, The Holy Father referred to the importance that Gospel poverty should play in the life of a bishop. He said that bishops are called to be "prophets who emphasize with courage the social sins tied to consumerism, to hedonism, and to an economy that produces an unacceptable divide between luxury and misery...But for the bishops' voices to be credible, they themselves must give proof of a conduct that is detached from private interests and attentive to those who are needy and weak. They must be an example to the community entrusted to them, teaching and supporting...the Church's social doctrine."

The Holy Father is challenging us bishops to lead more by example than by words. And that brings me to the third and final point that I would like to address. As we prepare to celebrate another Christmas, let's keep in mind what St. Paul wrote in 2nd Corinthians: "You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ: rich as he was, he made himself poor for your sake, in order to make you rich by means of his poverty."

A few years ago, I came across the following inspirational spot in a newsletter that I received from Radio KNOM in Alaska. I would like to close with it. It underscores how the Lord was able to do so much with so little. It's a lesson that we must remind ourselves of in an age that puts so much of importance on possessions and technology:

"Jesus was born in a borrowed manger. He preached from a borrowed boat, entered Jerusalem on a borrowed donkey, at the Last Supper in a borrowed room, and finally, was buried in a borrowed tomb." May the Lord bless you and all your loved ones this Christmas and throughout the New Year!