



The Holy See

BENEDICT XVI

GENERAL AUDIENCE

*Saint Peter's Square
Wednesday, 1st April 2009*

Apostolic Journey to Cameroon and Angola

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

As I announced last Sunday at the Angelus, today I am pausing to speak of my recent Apostolic Journey to Africa, the first in my Pontificate to that continent. It was limited to Cameroon and Angola, but with my Visit I intended to embrace in spirit all the African peoples and to bless them in the Lord's name. I experienced the traditional warm African welcome which I met with everywhere, and I willingly take this opportunity to express once again my deep gratitude to the Episcopates of the two countries, to the Heads of State, to all the Authorities and to all those who in their various capacities did their utmost to ensure the success of my Pastoral Visit.

My stay in Africa began on 17 March in Yaoundé, the capital of Cameroon, where I immediately found myself in the heart of Africa, and not only geographically. In fact, this country sums up many features of that vast continent and first and foremost its profoundly religious spirit which all the very numerous ethnic groups that populate it have in common. In Cameroon more than a quarter of the inhabitants are Catholic and live peacefully with the other religious communities. For this reason, in 1995 my beloved Predecessor John Paul II chose the capital of this very nation to promulgate the Apostolic Exhortation Ecclesia in Africa, after the first Synodal Assembly dedicated, precisely, to the African continent. This time, the Pope went there to present the Instrumentum Laboris of the Second Synodal Assembly for Africa, scheduled to be held in Rome next October and whose theme will be: "The Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace: "You are the salt of the earth.... You are the light of the world' (Mt 5: 13-14)".

At the meetings I had with the Bishops two days apart respectively of [Cameroon](#) and of [Angola and São Tomé e Príncipe](#), I wished, especially in this Pauline Year, to recall the urgent need for evangelization which is primarily incumbent on the Bishops themselves and stressed the collegial dimension, based on sacramental communion. I urged them always to be an example to their priests and to all the faithful, and to take an interest in the formation of the seminarians who, thanks be to God, are numerous and of the catechists who are becoming more and more necessary to the life of the Church in Africa. I encouraged the Bishops to promote the pastoral care of marriage and the family, the liturgy and culture, so as to enable lay people to withstand the attack of sects and esoteric groups. My affectionate wish was to strengthen them in the practice of charity and in the defence of the rights of the poor.

Then I am thinking back to the [solemn celebration of Vespers in Yaoundé in the Basilica of "Marie Reine des Apôtres", Patronness of Cameroon](#). It is a large, modern church that stands on the site where the first evangelizers of Cameroon worked, the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit. On the eve of the Solemnity of St Joseph to whose attentive custody God entrusted his most precious treasures, Mary and Jesus, we glorified the one Father who is in Heaven, together with the representatives of other Churches and ecclesial Communities. In contemplating the spiritual figure of St Joseph, who dedicated his life to Christ and to the Virgin Mary, I asked the priests, the consecrated people and the members of ecclesial movements to respond ever more faithfully to their calling, living in God's presence and in joyful obedience to his word.

At the Apostolic Nunciature in Yaoundé I had the opportunity also to meet with the [representatives of the Muslim community](#) in Cameroon. Reaffirming the importance of interreligious dialogue and collaboration between Christians and Muslims to help the world to open itself to God. It really was a very pleasant meeting.

One of the crowning events of the Journey was without a doubt the promulgation of the [Instrumentum Laboris](#) of the [Second Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops](#), on 19 March, the day of St Joseph and my name day in the Stadium of Yaoundé at the end of the [solemn Eucharistic Celebration in honour of St Joseph](#). It took place in a harmonious atmosphere among the People of God, "with glad shouts and songs of thanksgiving, a multitude keeping festival" according to the Psalm (Ps 42[41]: 4) of which we had a real experience. The Synodal Assembly will be celebrated in Rome, but in a certain sense it has already begun in the heart of the African continent, in the heart of the Christian family that lives, suffers and hopes there. For this reason the fact that the publication of the "Working Document" coincided with the Feast of St Joseph, a model of faith and hope like the first Patriarch, Abraham, seemed to me to be fortuitous. Faith in the "God who is close", who revealed his loving Face in Jesus, is the guarantee of a trustworthy hope for Africa and for the whole world, a guarantee of a future of reconciliation, justice and peace.

After the solemn liturgical assembly and the festive presentation of the Working Document, at the

Apostolic Nunciature in Yaoundé, I was able to meet with the Members of the Special Council for Africa of the Synod of Bishops and to live with them a moment of intense communion: we reflected together on Africa's history in a theological and pastoral perspective. It was almost like a first meeting of the Synod itself, in a brotherly discussion between the different episcopates and the Pope concerning the prospects of the Synod of reconciliation and peace in Africa. Christianity, in fact and this was evident has put down deep roots in African soil from the outset, as is attested by the numerous martyrs and saints, pastors, teachers and catechists who flourished, first in the north and later, in subsequent epochs, in the rest of the continent: let us think of Cyprian, of Augustine, of his mother, Monica, and of Athanasius; and then of the Martyrs of Uganda, of Josephine Bakhita and of the many others. In this season, which sees Africa working to consolidate her political independence and the construction of the national identities in a now globalized context, the Church accompanies Africans, recalling the important message of the Second Vatican Council, applied through the first and now, the Second Assembly of the Synod for Africa. In the midst of the unfortunately numerous and tragic conflicts which still afflict various regions of that continent the Church knows she must be a sign and an instrument of unity and reconciliation so that the whole of Africa may build together a future of justice, solidarity and peace, putting into practice the teachings of the Gospel.

A powerful sign of the humanizing action of Christ's message is certainly the Cardinal Léger Centre in Yaoundé, destined for the rehabilitation of disabled people. Its founder was the Canadian Cardinal Paul-Émile Léger, who chose to retire after the Council of 1968, to work among the poor. At that Centre, which he later handed over to the State, I met numerous brothers and sisters in situations of suffering, and shared with them but also drew from them the hope that comes from faith even in situations of suffering.

The second stage and the second part of my Journey was Angola, certain aspects of which make it another emblematic country. In fact, Angola has emerged from a long civil war and is now involved in the work of national reconciliation and reconstruction. But how could this reconciliation and this reconstruction be authentic if they were achieved at the expense of the poorest people who have a right, like everyone, to have a share of the resources of their land? This is why, with this Visit of mine whose first purpose was obviously to strengthen the Church in the faith, I also intended to encourage the social process that is under way. In Angola what my venerable Predecessors repeated more than once is really tangible: all is lost with war, all can be reborn with peace. However, in order to rebuild a nation great moral energy is required. And here, once again, the role of the Church is important; she is called to carry out an educational role, working in depth to renew and form consciences.

St Paul is the Patron of the city of Luanda, the capital of Angola. This is why I chose to celebrate the Eucharist with the priests, seminarians, religious, catechists and other pastoral workers on Saturday 21 March, in the church dedicated to the Apostle. Once again St Paul's personal experience spoke to us of the encounter with the Risen Christ, capable of transforming people and

society. Historical contexts change and it is necessary to be mindful of this but Christ remains the true force of radical renewal of man and of the human community. Therefore to return to God, to be converted to Christ means going ahead toward the fullness of life.

In Luanda, to express the Church's closeness to the efforts for the reconstruction of Angola and of so many African regions, I wanted to dedicate two special encounters respectively to youth and to women. With the young people, in the stadium, it was a celebration of joy and hope, unfortunately saddened by the death of two girls who were crushed by the crowd at the entrance. Africa is a very young continent but too many of its sons and daughters, children and adolescents, have already suffered serious wounds that only Jesus Christ, the Risen Crucified One can heal by imbuing in them, with his Spirit, the strength to love and to work for justice and peace. I then paid homage to the women for the service that so many of them offer to faith, to human dignity, to life, to the family. I reaffirmed their full right to be involved in public life, but not to the detriment of their role in the family, a fundamental mission to be carried out in responsible sharing with all the other members of society, especially with the husbands and fathers. So this was the message that I left to the new generations and to the world of women, extending it later to all at the great Eucharistic assembly on Sunday, 22 March, concelebrated with the Bishops of the countries of southern Africa, with the participation of a million of the faithful. If the African peoples I told them like ancient Israel, base their hope on the Word of God, rich in their religious and cultural heritage, they will truly be able to build a future of reconciliation and stable peace for all.

Dear brothers and sisters, how many other considerations I have in my heart and how many memories come to mind as I think of this journey! I ask you to thank the Lord for the marvels he has worked and continues to work in Africa thanks to the generous action of the missionaries, men and women religious, volunteers, priests and catechists, and in young communities full of enthusiasm and faith. I also ask you to pray for the African peoples, very dear to me, so that they may be able to face courageously the great social, financial and spiritual challenges of the present time. We entrust everything and everyone to the maternal intercession of Mary Most Holy, Queen of Africa, and of the African Saints and Blesseds.

To special groups

I welcome all the English-speaking visitors present today, including the school and university groups from Denmark, England and America. As Holy Week draws close, may your visit to Rome be a time of deep spiritual renewal. Upon all of you I invoke God's abundant Blessings of joy and peace.

Lastly, I greet the *young people*, the *sick* and the *newlyweds*. In the imminence of Holy Week in which we retrace the moments of the Passion, death and Resurrection of Christ, I would like to invite you to pause in intimate recollection, to contemplate this supreme Mystery from which our

salvation flows. You will find in it, dear *young people*, a source of joy and you, dear *sick people*, comfort in feeling the suffering Face of the Saviour close to you. I hope that you, dear *newlyweds*, may move ahead with trust on the common path on which you have just set out, sustained by the joy of the Crucified and Risen Christ.

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