



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE BISHOPS FROM THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT***

Monday, 6 February 2006

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

I greet you with joy during your pilgrimage to the places where the Apostles Peter and Paul witnessed to Christ the Saviour to the point of martyrdom. I warmly hope that your Meetings with the Pope and his collaborators, an expression of the communion of your local Churches with the See of Peter, will increase your apostolic dynamism at the service of the People of God entrusted to your care.

I thank you for everything you have told me at our Meetings. Please assure the members of your Dioceses of my spiritual closeness to them at this time when, together with all the inhabitants of the Country, they are asked to work for peace and reconciliation in the period subsequent to the war years which took a toll of millions, particularly in your region. May they be courageous champions of the dignity of every human being and daring witnesses of Christ's charity in order to build an increasingly just and fraternal society!

The commitment to peace is a challenge to the Bishop's evangelizing mission. Your quinquennial reports describe the difficult conditions in which you exercise your ministry. Past conflicts and continuing areas of insecurity are leaving deep wounds in the population, giving rise to weariness and despair.

During this year which your local Church has dedicated to Bl. Anwarite Nengapeta, I hope that the imperative of charity will spur you to become prophets of justice and peace yourselves, through the holiness of your lives and the missionary zeal that enlivens you.

Indeed, "for the Church, charity is not a kind of welfare activity which could equally well be left to others, but is a part of her nature, an indispensable expression of her very being" (Encyclical

Letter *Deus Caritas Est*, n. 25).

I am delighted with the pastoral ministry that the priests, consecrated persons and various charitable agencies carry out locally in the *living Ecclesial Communities*, to share in the concern for charity in the service of the least, making themselves credible witnesses of the love Christ bears them.

Work for the unity of the People of God and do your utmost to create a people of brothers and sisters, assembled by Christ and sent out by him!

It is important that you pursue the demanding task of implanting the Gospel in your culture. You should respect the wealth of authentic African values but also purify them of all that might make them incompatible with the Gospel truth.

Furthermore, it is desirable that you restore the Sacrament of Pen-ance, through which God sets man free from sin, enabling him to be increasingly a leaven of reconciliation and peace in the Church and in society.

Priests and the faithful alike are called to rediscover the Eucharist as the centre of their existence, acquiring at that *great school of peace* a deep sense of their commitments and a powerful appeal to become promoters of dialogue and communion (cf. *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, n. 27).

Building the Church, the Family of God, in your Country is as demanding a task as it is elsewhere, but I know the apostolic dynamism that enlivens you. It is fortunate that the National Bishops' Conference of the Congo has spared no effort through its multiple interventions to open up paths of reconciliation and brotherhood in hearts and consciences.

In this regard, it is to be hoped that the joint sensitization campaign carried out with the Leaders of other religious confessions to propose a civic education for all citizens will bear good fruit.

The Church is called to take part in this work, in her own place and in accordance with her own vocation. She is also called to make a specific contribution to the common good and to the consolidation of a State based on rights, showing her daily commitment to the material and spiritual well-being of all the Congolese.

For this reason, it is important for this to offer a specific formation to the Country's political leaders. A thorough examination of the rich heritage of the Church's social doctrine will enable them to reflect on their engagement in the service of the common good and to take stock of the moral requirements needed to set up just institutions at the service of the renewal of society.

If the Word of the Gospel is to be heard in every corner of the Country and the Church's teaching

is to exercise a deep influence on consciences, mindsets and customs, the use of the media, especially radio and television, is proving more necessary than ever and should remain one of your constant concerns.

Also through these media the Church will be better able to carry out her prophetic ministry, and especially to limit the action of the sects that frequently use the new technologies to attract and confuse the faithful. The modern media make possible an educational activity enlivened by passion for the truth and also by an action that aims at defending the dignity of the human person and encouraging the authentic culture of your people (cf. *Christifideles Laici*, n. 44).

The evangelization of the family is a pastoral priority. The flow of refugees or displaced persons, the pandemic of AIDS but also the radical changes in contemporary society have broken up numerous families, undermining the family institution with the risk of weakening the very social fabric.

It is important at all levels of diocesan and social life to encourage Catholics to preserve and promote the fundamental values of the family. In this spirit, it is right to be attentive to the human and spiritual preparation of couples for marriage and to follow up the pastoral care of families, recalling the eminent dignity of Christian marriage, one and indissoluble, and proposing a solid conjugal spirituality so that families may grow in holiness.

The consecrated life is present in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the rich diversity of its forms. I affectionately greet all the consecrated people; they are concerned to witness to Christ's love among their brethren.

I pay homage in particular to those who, despite the emergency, have chosen to stay with the tried peoples in order to provide them with the help, comfort and spiritual support they need. I ask all consecrated people, irreplaceable signs of the Kingdom that is coming, to bear a prophetic witness in the Church and in Congolese society, calling them especially, in perfect faithfulness to the evangelical counsels, to reject every temptation of withdrawal into self and to spread a real spirit of brotherhood among all.

Young people have great vitality; they are a real treasure for the Church and for the whole Country. However, they constitute a population that has been rendered fragile by an insecure future, by the experience of precariousness and by the distressing ravages caused by AIDS. It is your task to nourish their faith and hope by offering them a solid Christian formation.

One thinks in particular of the pastoral projects for the human and spiritual rehabilitation of street children and child soldiers.

I also appeal to the Catholic schools and to all who are concerned with the formation and

education of youth to give them the means to grow in charity, to build a sense of duty and to develop mutual respect in the apprenticeship of dialogue and community service, so that they may be active evangelizers and contribute to the renewal of the social fabric.

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate, at the end of our Meeting, how can I omit to tell you once again of the well-grounded hope I share with you of seeing reconciliation and peace triumph in your Country and throughout the Great Lakes Region! May all those who preside over the future of the Nation join forces to act responsibly in order to achieve a lasting peace!

I also appeal to the International Community not to forget Africa, especially by pursuing courageous and determined action to consolidate your Country's political and economic stability.

Lastly, I urge your communities to undertake "an extensive process of education and witness aimed at making everyone more aware of the need for a fuller appreciation of the truth of peace" (*Message for World Day of Peace 2006*, n. 16, 8 December 2005; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 21 December, p. 7).

On returning to your Dioceses, take back to all your priests, deacons, men and women religious, catechists and lay faithful the affection of the Successor of Peter, who calls them to live the service of charity in their daily lives while being more and more united in Christ, and who imparts to them as well as to you a special Apostolic Blessing.

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