



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO BENIN

18-20 NOVEMBER 2011

**VISIT AT THE BASILICA
OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION OF MARY OF OUIDAH
AND SIGNING OF THE POST-SYNODAL APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION**

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

*Basilica of the Immaculate Conception, Ouidah
Saturday, 19 November 2011*

[[Video](#)]

Your Eminences,

Dear Brother Bishops and Priests,

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I cordially thank the Secretary General of the Synod of Bishops, Archbishop Nikola Eterović, for his words of welcome and presentation, as well as all the members of the Special Council for Africa who helped to collate the results of the Synodal Assembly in preparation for the publication of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation.

Today, the celebration of the Synod concludes with the signing of the Exhortation *[Africae Munus](#)*. The Synod gave an impetus to the Catholic Church in Africa, which prayed, reflected on and discussed the theme of reconciliation, justice and peace. This process was marked by a special closeness uniting the Successor of Peter and the Particular Churches in Africa. Bishops, but also experts, auditors, special guests and fraternal delegates, all came to Rome to celebrate this important ecclesial event. I myself went to Yaoundé to present the *[Instrumentum Laboris](#)* of the Synod to the Presidents of the Bishops' Conferences, as a sign of my interest and concern for all the peoples of the African continent and the neighbouring islands. I now have the joy of returning to Africa, and particularly to Benin, to consign this final document, which takes up the reflections of

the Synod Fathers and presents them synthetically as part of a broad pastoral vision.

La Deuxième Assemblée spéciale pour l'Afrique du Synode des Évêques a bénéficié de l'Exhortation apostolique post-synodale *Ecclesia in Africa* du Bienheureux Jean-Paul II, dans laquelle a été soulignée fortement l'urgence de l'évangélisation du continent, qui ne peut être dissociée de la promotion humaine. Par ailleurs, le concept d'*Église-famille de Dieu* y a été développé. Ce dernier a produit beaucoup de fruits spirituels pour l'Église catholique et pour l'action d'évangélisation et de promotion humaine qu'elle a mise en œuvre, pour la société africaine dans son ensemble. En effet, l'Église est appelée à se découvrir toujours plus comme une famille. Pour les chrétiens, il s'agit de la communauté des croyants qui loue Dieu Un et Trine, célèbre les grands mystères de notre foi et anime avec charité les rapports entre les personnes, les groupes et les nations, au-delà des diversités ethniques, culturelles et religieuses. Dans ce service rendu à chaque personne, l'Église est ouverte à la collaboration avec toutes les composantes de la société, en particulier avec les représentants des Églises et des Communautés ecclésiales qui ne sont pas encore en pleine communion avec l'Église catholique, tout comme avec les représentants des religions non chrétiennes, surtout ceux des Religions Traditionnelles et de l'Islam.

Prenant en compte cet horizon ecclésial, la Deuxième Assemblée spéciale pour l'Afrique s'est concentrée sur le thème de la réconciliation, de la justice et de la paix. Il s'agit de points importants pour le monde en général, mais ils acquièrent une actualité toute particulière en Afrique. Il suffit de rappeler les tensions, les violences, les guerres, les injustices, les abus de toutes sortes, nouveaux et anciens, qui ont marqué cette année. Le thème principal concernait la réconciliation avec Dieu et avec le prochain. Une Église réconciliée en son sein et entre tous ses membres pourra devenir signe prophétique de réconciliation au niveau de la société, de chaque pays et du continent tout entier. Saint Paul écrit : « *Tout vient de Dieu, qui nous a réconciliés avec Lui par le Christ et nous a confié le ministère de la réconciliation* » (2 Co 5, 18). Le fondement de cette réconciliation se trouve dans la nature même de l'Église qui est « *dans le Christ, en quelque sorte le sacrement, c'est-à-dire à la fois le signe et le moyen de l'union intime avec Dieu et de l'unité de tout le genre humain* » (LG 1). Sur cette assise, l'Église en Afrique est appelée à promouvoir la *paix* et la *justice*. La *Porte du Non-retour* et celle du *Pardon* nous rappellent ce devoir et nous poussent à dénoncer et à combattre toute forme d'esclavage.

[The Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops benefited from the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa* of Blessed John Paul II, which emphasized the urgent need to evangelize this continent, an activity which cannot be separated from the work of human promotion. The Exhortation also developed the concept of *the Church as God's Family*. This concept has borne many spiritual fruits for the Catholic Church and for the activity of evangelization and human promotion which she has carried out in African society as a whole. The Church is called to see herself increasingly as a family. For Christians, this means being a community of believers which praises the triune God, celebrates the great mysteries of our faith

and enlivens with charity relationships between individuals, groups and nations, above and beyond ethnic, cultural and religious differences. In offering this service to everyone, the Church is open to cooperation with all the components of society, particularly with the representatives of the Churches and Ecclesial Communities not yet in full communion with the Catholic Church, as well as with the representatives of the non-Christian religions, above all those of traditional religions and of Islam.

Within this ecclesial horizon, the Second Special Assembly for Africa concentrated on the theme of reconciliation, justice and peace. These are important issues for the world in general, but they take on a particular urgency in Africa. We need but recall the tensions, the acts of violence, the wars, the injustices and abuses of all sorts, new and old, which have marked this year. The principal theme was that of reconciliation with God and with one's neighbour. But a Church reconciled within herself and among all her members can become a prophetic sign of reconciliation in society within each country and the continent as a whole. Saint Paul writes: "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor 5:18). The basis of this reconciliation is found in the very nature of the Church, which "in Christ, is a sacrament – a sign and instrument that is, of communion with God and of the unity of the entire human race" (*Lumen Gentium*, 1). Following on this assembly, the Church in Africa is called to promote peace and justice. The Gate of No Return, as well as that of Pardon, remind us of this duty and impel us to combat every form of slavery.]

É preciso não cessar jamais de procurar os caminhos da paz. Esta é um dos bens mais preciosos. Para alcançá-la, é necessário ter a coragem da reconciliação que nasce do perdão, da vontade de recomeçar a vida comunitária, da visão solidária do futuro, da perseverança para superar as dificuldades. Os homens, reconciliados e em paz com Deus e o próximo, podem trabalhar por uma justiça maior no seio da sociedade. É preciso não esquecer que a justiça primeira é, segundo o Evangelho, cumprir a vontade de Deus. Desta opção de base, derivam inúmeras iniciativas que visam promover a justiça na África e o bem de todos os habitantes do continente, principalmente dos mais carenciados que precisam de emprego, escolas e hospitais.

África, terra de um Novo Pentecostes, tem confiança em Deus! Animada pelo Espírito de Jesus Cristo ressuscitado, torna-te a grande família de Deus, generosa com todos os teus filhos e filhas, agentes de reconciliação, de paz e de justiça. África, Boa Nova para a Igreja, torna-te isto mesmo para o mundo inteiro! Obrigado!

[We must never give up the search for new paths of peace! Peace is one of our greatest treasures! To attain peace, we need to have courage and the reconciliation born of forgiveness, the will once more to live as one, to share a vision of the future and to persevere in overcoming difficulties. Men and women reconciled and at peace with God and neighbour can work for greater justice in society. Let us not forget that the Gospel teaches that justice means above all doing God's will. This fundamental resolve spawns countless initiatives aimed at promoting justice in

Africa and the welfare of all its peoples, especially the most disadvantaged and those in need of employment, schools and hospitals.

Africa, land of a New Pentecost, put your trust in God! Impelled by the Spirit of the Risen Christ, become God's great family, generous with all your sons and daughters, agents of reconciliation, peace and justice! Africa, Good News for the Church, become Good News for the entire world! Thank you!]