



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO THE BISHOPS OF THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE OF MOZAMBICO,
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Saturday, 9 May 2015

[Multimedia]

Beloved Brothers in the Episcopate,

Welcome to your *ad limina Apostolorum*. With your dioceses at heart, the purpose of your visit in these days is to celebrate and increasingly strengthen the bonds between you and the Church of Rome, which administers in charity. We are one people, with one single soul, called by the Lord who loves and sustains us. With brotherly joy, I receive and greet you, extending my greetings to Cardinal Alexandre and Cardinal Júlio, the Bishops emeritus, the diocesan and missionary clergy, consecrated men and women, and all the lay faithful of Mozambique, namely catechists and leaders of small Christian communities. I thank Bishop Lúcio Muandula for the words he addressed to me on behalf of the whole Episcopal Conference, sharing the joys and hopes, the difficulties and concerns of your people. I express to you my gratitude for the generous pastoral work you carry out in your diocesan communities and I assure you of my constant union and spiritual solidarity. For my part, I ask that you not forget to pray for me, that I may be able to help the Church as the Lord wants me to help her.

“Do you love me?": the Lord asked Peter a question that continues to resound in the hearts of his successors. And, to my affirmative response, he asked: “Feed my sheep” (cf. Jn 21:15-17). And the same — I am sure — happened with you. The Lord made himself a beggar of love and he questions us on the only issue that is truly essential to feeding his sheep, his Church. Jesus is the supreme Pastor of the Church and it is in his name and by his mandate that we have been given the task to care for his flock offering ourselves completely to the point of giving our life. Let us put aside all possible import and false presumption, and bend down to “wash the feet” of all those whom the Lord has entrusted to us.

In your pastoral solicitude, reserve a special place, a very special place, to your priests. God

commands us to love our neighbour, and the closest neighbours of the Bishop are his priests: indispensable collaborators, whose advice and help you seek, men whom you look after as a father, brother and friend. Let your heart, your hand, and your door always remain open to them. Time spent with them is never wasted. Among your first duties is the spiritual care of the presbytery, but do not forget the human needs of each priest, especially in the most delicate and important moments of their ministry and their life.

The fruitfulness of our mission, dear Brothers in the priesthood, is not assured by the number of collaborators or by the prestige of the institution or by the quantity of resources available. What matters is being permeated by the love of Christ, allowing oneself to be led by the Holy Spirit and grafting one's existence to the tree of life, which is the Cross of the Lord. And it is from the Cross, the supreme act of mercy and love, that one is reborn as a "new creature" (Gal 6:15). You, beloved priest, are *alter Christus*! Of St Paul, the unsurpassable model of the Christian missionary, we know that he sought to be united to Jesus in his death so as to take part in his resurrection (cf. Phil 3:10-11). In his ministry he experienced suffering, weakness and defeat, but also joy and consolation. This is the Paschal Mystery of Jesus: the mystery of the death and resurrection. The Paschal Mystery is the beating heart of the Church's mission. If you remain in this mystery, you will be sheltered both from a worldly and triumphalist vision of the mission as well as from the discouragement that can arise from trial and failure.

But today do missionaries like Paul still exist, men and women clinging to the Cross of Christ, espoused to Christ and despoiled of everything to embrace the All? Yes, and we rejoice with these men and women, totally consecrated to Christ, immolated and identified with Christ, who are able to say: "it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20). In this Year of Consecrated Life, may thanks and praise be raised by your religious communities for the testimony of faith and service that men and women religious offer in the different sectors of ecclesial and social life, especially in the care of and solicitude for the poor and for all kinds of human, material, moral and spiritual poverty. I am thinking of the great number of community schools run by the different religious families as well as the different centres of hospitality, orphanages and family homes where so many abandoned children and young people live and grow; I also wish to point out the heroic dedication of so many nurses and doctors, nuns and priests. Beloved Brother Bishops, be grateful for the presence and service that consecrated women and men carry out in Mozambique; the just participation of religious communities in the diocese is important: they are not merely material reserves, but offer charisms that enrich the diocese. This cannot be left to chance or improvisation; it calls for diverse strengths and experience working together in a common project, so they are not dispersed in many secondary or superfluous initiatives but be concentrated on the fundamental thing which is encounter with Christ, his mercy, his love, and that they may love their brothers and sisters as He loved them.

Your pastoral endeavour imposes on you the obligation to unite, to harmonize and rationalize the ecclesial components of the dioceses. I know you are already doing so, and let no one be walled

in or lament what he does not have; act so as to imprint a renewed apostolic zeal in your Christian communities, to confer on them an outward missionary dynamic in order to accompany others — as Jesus did with the disciples of Emmaus — stirring hope in them, enlivening their heart and stirring in them the desire to come home to the bosom of the family, to the Church where our sources dwell: Sacred Scripture, catechesis, the Sacraments, the community, the friendship of the Lord, Mary and the Apostles. May this “family” atmosphere, the serene and cordial environment for all, foster harmony and responsible collaboration in the heart of the pilgrim Church in Mozambique, by inviting Bishops to communion with one another and to solicitude for the universal Church. This solicitude and communion can be seen when the Episcopal Conference functions in a fruitful way, through generous collaboration between neighbouring dioceses or within the same Ecclesiastical Province, offering services and solutions for the common good.

Beloved Brothers in the Episcopate, go out to your faithful, go to the peripheries of your dioceses and to any “existential peripheries” where there is suffering, isolation and human degradation. A Bishop who lives in the midst of his faithful has ears open to hear “what the Spirit says to the Churches” (Rev 2:7) and the “voice of the sheep”, and also through the diocesan bodies meant to give him counsel and support, thereby promoting faithful and constructive dialogue: presbyterial councils, pastoral councils, councils for economic affairs. One cannot imagine a bishop without these diocesan advisers. This also means being with your people. Here I am referring to your duty to reside in the diocese; the people themselves call for it; they want to see their Bishop, they want him to walk with them, to be close to them. They need this presence in order to live and, in a certain way, breathe. You are spouses of your diocesan community, deeply bound to them.

We all receive the water of Baptism, share in the same Eucharist, possess the same Holy Spirit, who reminds us what Jesus taught us. Well then! The first thing that Jesus teaches us is this: to encounter one another and, by encountering, to help. Encounter with the other makes the heart grow, increases the capacity to love. The Pastors and faithful of Mozambique need to develop the culture of encounter to a greater degree. Jesus asks you just one thing: that you go, that you seek out and encounter the neediest. How can we ignore victims of natural disasters? As we sadly witnessed a short time ago, these never cease to sow destruction, suffering and death, or increase the number of displaced people and refugees. These people need us to share in their pain, in their anxieties, in their problems. They need us to look at them with love; it is necessary to go to encounter them, as Jesus did.

Finally, looking at the whole country, we see that the present challenges of Mozambique require that the culture of encounter be promoted in greater measure. Tensions and conflicts have undermined the social fabric, destroyed families and above all the future of thousands of young people. The most effective way to oppose the mindset of arrogance and inequality, as well as social division, is to invest in the field of “an education which teaches [young people] critical thinking and encourages the development of mature moral values” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 64). Dear Bishops, continue to support your youth, especially through the creation of areas of human

and professional formation. In this connection, it is opportune to sensitize the world of leaders of society and to revive pastoral care in universities and schools, combining education with the proclamation of the Gospel (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, nn. 132-134). The needs are so great that there is no way to possibly satisfy them with mere individual initiatives or with the combination of individuals formed in individualism. Social problems must be answered with community networks. Joining forces and unified direction are necessary: the Episcopal Conference helps with this. Listed among its functions is “a channel for dialogue with the political authority common to the whole territory” (*Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops*, n. 28). In this regard, I encourage a determined implementation of good relations with the Government, not of dependence, but of healthy collaboration — in the terms of the Agreement undersigned on 7 December 2011 between the Holy See and the Republic of Mozambique — and taking an interest in the laws that are approved by Parliament. Beloved Bishops, do not spare efforts in support of the family and defending life from conception to natural death. In this regard, bear in mind the options of a disciple of Christ and the beauty of being a mother who accompanies and supports the family and the local community. May the family always be defended as the privileged source of fraternity, respect for others and the primary path to peace.

Dear Church of God, pilgrims in the land of Mozambique, dear Brothers in the Episcopate, Jesus does not say to you: Go! Fend for yourselves!” But “Go, ... I am with you always, to the close of the age” (Mt 28:19.20). Here is where our strength and consolation lie: He goes before us; when we go out to take the Gospel with the true apostolic spirit, He goes with us. This is fundamental for us: God always precedes us. When we must go to an extreme periphery, at times fear assails us, but there is no reason! In reality, Jesus is already there; He awaits us in the heart of that brother, in his wounded flesh, in his oppressed life, in his soul without faith. Jesus is there in that brother. He always precedes us; let us follow Him! We must have the audacity to open new ways to proclaim the Gospel. I entrust to the Most Holy Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church, your hopes and your concerns, the journey of your dioceses and the development of your Homeland, as I invoke the Blessing of the Lord upon all the pilgrim People of God with their Pastors in the beloved Nation of Mozambique.