



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
TO MADAGASCAR, LA RÉUNION,
ZAMBIA AND MALAWI

EUCHARISTIC CELEBRATION FOR THE FAITHFUL OF MALAWI

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

“Army Air Wing” Airport, Lilongwe (Malawi)
Saturday, 6 May 1989

*“God has gone up...
God is king of all the earth
God reigns over the nations” (Ps. 47(46), 5-8).*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,
Dear people of Lilongwe and the surrounding district,*

1. This Mass celebrated here *in Lilongwe*, the new capital of Malawi, is *the final act of my present visit to Africa*. I have spent eight memorable days in four different countries. In this Eucharist I bring all the peoples of Africa before the Lord of heaven and earth, and I renew my call to you all *to love him*. In my pastoral visits throughout the world I make this appeal to people of every race and language: keep close to Christ! This is my message for everyone here today. Yes, *keep close to Christ!* I ask you to remember this long after my departure.

I greet Bishop Chimole, *the priests of the diocese, the White Fathers* who began this mission; the *Montfort Fathers who contributed so much to the evangelization of the South*; the Carmelite, Franciscan and Kiltegan Fathers; the Brothers and Sisters from Congregations too numerous to mention, but all loved and esteemed for their evangelical witness and loving service of the Church here. I send a special greeting to the contemplative Poor Clares, whose life of prayer and penance has a hidden spiritual fruitfulness. And I offer my encouragement to all the *catechists*, the

members of ecclesial movements and organizations, and to all of God's people present at this Mass.

I thank the public authorities for their participation in this moment of joy for the whole Catholic community. And to all the children and young people here I say: the Pope loves you and places his hope in you!

2. We heard in the Reading from the Acts of the Apostles that Christ, forty days after his Resurrection and in the presence of the apostles, "was lifted up and a cloud took him out of their sight" (Act. 1, 9).

The cloud manifests God's presence while at the same time veiling him from sight (Cfr. Ex. 24, 15-18). In the Old Testament we read that the Lord descended to Moses in a cloud: "The Lord came down in a cloud and spoke to him" (Nu. 11, 25). When Jesus was transfigured, the cloud again revealed the presence of God (Cfr. Matth. 17, 1-8). Christ will come again "upon the clouds" (Apoc. 1, 7), while the elect will go up to meet him, likewise upon the clouds (1 Thess. 4, 17).

Christ was taken up in the cloud and hidden from the sight of the apostles. *Christ* who rose from the dead on the third day is triumphant over death. Now that he has ascended to the Father, he *has gone to prepare a place for the elect*, who will share fully in this new life for ever in heaven. Christ left the world, but he will manifest himself again at the end of time (Act, 1, 11).

3. The Letter to the Ephesians also speaks of Jesus' return to the Father. Saint Paul writes: "In saying, 'he ascended', what does it mean but that *he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth?*" (Eph. 4, 9).

Yes. "Descended": the Son of God, of one being with the Father, God from God and Light from Light, became man. "*Descended*" – *sent by the Father* in the Holy Spirit. "Descended" for our salvation and to redeem us from sin.

This victory has been achieved through the Cross – by means of Jesus' Passion and Death. Christ crucified and buried in the tomb "rose again on the third day" and thereby confirmed his power over death. *Herein lies the truth about Jesus Christ*, true God and true man. And so Saint Paul adds: "He who descended is he who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things" (*Ibid.* 4, 10) .

Christ "ascended" and is "at the right side of the Father" as the Eternal Son. *The one Mediator between God and us, he was sent to intercede on our behalf*. He became the Son of Man and as true man he "returned to the Father". He reigns over all, but his kingdom is not of this world (Cfr. Jo. 18, 36). That is what Christ said before Pilate.

At the same time, he – the Messiah – proclaimed the coming of the kingdom and handed it over to the apostles and to the Church as a task to be fulfilled. And if man, together with all other living creatures, is for the time being subject to death, he who has conquered death has revealed and established the kingdom which absolutely *exceeds all earthly powers and kingdoms, and all the powers of darkness and death*.

4. Unfortunately, the signs of darkness are familiar to everyone. There are personal sufferings and personal failings. There are collective and social evils which call for courage and unending efforts to resolve them.

I know that *many young people cannot find work* and easily lose hope. Unemployment does not enhance a person's dignity, whereas "through work man not only transforms nature, adapting it to his own needs, but he also achieves fulfilment as a human being and indeed, in a sense, becomes 'more a human being'" (IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Laborem Exercens*, 9). On many occasions I have appealed for a new economic order that will permit the peoples of developing countries to guide their own destinies in this field and to guarantee sources of employment for the active population (Cfr. EIUSDEM *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 26). I encourage you, young people, not to lose confidence in yourselves. You understand that *fulfilment and happiness lie not so much in having* as in being: in being mature and responsible men and women committed to building a society that is just, peaceful and concerned for the weak and the needy.

In recent years Africa has seen an alarming increase in the number of people who have had to flee from their homeland due to war or hunger. *Malawi has opened its doors to thousands of refugees*, many of whom are Catholics. Every effort by the public authorities, the Churches and international organizations to help these brothers and sisters must be encouraged and supported. To you who have had to cross the border, I say: Do not lose hope! Christ himself was once a refugee. He was a refugee in Egypt – here in Africa! He is at your side to give you courage and hope. We must all pray for peace, greater stability and harmony in this continent. The future of Africa is at stake.

5. Brothers and sisters: before I leave Africa I wish to appeal to you and to all people of good will *to realize the importance and sacredness of family life*. A people cannot be strong without a strong family life. A nation cannot long survive in justice and social harmony without a healthy family life. The family is the original environment of personal development. It is the foremost school of human relations and social maturity. It is the place of first religious notions and practices.

The estrangement of so many married couples and the *tragedy of broken marriages* in cause for grave concern. Unity must be reflected in a deep bond of love between parents and between them and their children. *African cultures have always stressed love for children. Is Africa to renounce that love?* In favour of what? My appeal reaches out to all parents: love your children as God's greatest gift to you. Introduce them to Christ, lead them in his ways.

Just as parents are the first teachers of the young in the ways of faith, *Catholic schools* too have an important role as centres of formation in faith and human growth. *I thank the Sisters, Brothers and lay people* who have dedicated themselves to serving the young in this way. It is my fervent hope that collaboration between the State and the Church will continue to give Catholic schools the freedom and support they need to promote education. The children and young people are Malawi's future.

6. The theme of my visit has been "*Be Converted and Live*". Your bishops have written a Pastoral Letter on the subject to remind you that the followers of Christ are constantly being called to conversion and holiness of life. What does it mean to lead a life of conversion? It means living in faithfulness as Christ was faithful – faithful to his Father and faithful to his promises. *For the people of Malawi today, it means living in fidelity to Christ*, in a spirit of love, of generous service to others, of respect, unity and harmony. It means being honest, truthful and reliable in human relations. It means accepting others with their own traditions and special gifts. As converted and grace-filled people, you must proclaim the loving and powerful presence of Christ in your cities, towns, villages and country areas. Christ calls each one of you away from sin and back to the light – the light of faith, hope and love.

Here today in Lilongwe, at the end of my visit to Malawi and to Africa, let us give thanks to God *for the grace that is yours in Jesus Christ* and for the Church that is present in your midst, seeking to reveal the love of God for you all. The Christian is "called in grace" (*Gal. 1, 6*), "established in grace" (*Rom. 5, 2*), and lives under its reign (Cfr. *ibid. 5, 21; 6, 14*). This existence *is life in the fullest sense of the word*, the life of those who have "returned from the dead" and who live a new life with the Risen Christ (*Ibid. 6, 4. 8*). Through grace we succeed in becoming ourselves. Through grace we grow in holiness before God.

I put before you today a challenge – a challenge to reject a way of living which does not correspond to the best of your local traditions and your Christian faith. Many people in Africa look beyond Africa for the so-called "freedom of the modern way of life". Today I urge you to *look inside yourselves. Look to the riches of your own traditions, look to the faith* which we are celebrating in this assembly. Here you will find genuine freedom – here you will find Christ who will lead you to the truth.

7. We read in Saint Mark's Gospel:

"...the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that attended it" (*Marc. 16, 19-20*) .

Yes. The Lord ascended. But he remains with us. He is with you here in Malawi.

Today, dear friends, I bid farewell to this beautiful land and to you, the people who have welcomed me with such kindness and love. I thank you with all my heart. I ask God's blessing on *the people of the northern part of the country*, some of whom are here today. Unfortunately, I have not been able to visit you on this occasion. I assure you of my thoughts, my affection and my prayers.

I take with me the remembrance of your smiling faces, and the hope which this country offers for the future of Africa and the future of the Church. I pray that the work of evangelization which began here almost a century ago and which has already borne much fruit will continue to yield a rich harvest. Christ's message must be made known to all. I pray that the Catholic Church in Malawi will grow in spiritual stature and will be a sure light for all people to follow.

Be converted and live! God bless Malawi! Amen.

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