



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC PILGRIMAGE TO AFRICA

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ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE BISHOPS OF KENYA

Nairobi

Wednesday, 7 May 1980

Venerable and dear Brothers in our Lord Jesus Christ,

1. Today during this easter season it is a cause of deep joy and a source of pastoral strength for us to assemble in Nairobi, to gather together in the name of Jesus who said: "I am the resurrection and the life"^[1].

We are extremely conscious that our ministry in Africa and our service to the universal Church is placed *under the sign of the Risen Christ*. For, together with all our brother Bishops throughout the world, we are successors of the Body of Apostles that was chosen to witness to the Resurrection.

The knowledge that "with great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus"^[2] truly strengthens us and uplifts us, because we know that we have received the inheritance of the Apostolic College. For us Bishops this is an hour of trust in the Risen Lord, an hour of Easter joy, an hour of great hope for the future of Africa.

2. On this occasion my thoughts go to all the Bishops of Africa, and I note with deep satisfaction that the members of the Episcopal Conference of Kenya are resolutely engaged in many programmes of collaboration and joint action with their *fellow Bishops from the AMECEA countries* of Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Malawi, the Sudan and Ethiopia. In the abundant strength that comes from charity and mutual support, your ministry is sustained and enriched. Be assured of my admiration and esteem for the unity that you express in diversity and in fraternal collaboration, and

for your concerted efforts on behalf of the evangelization of those countries that have so much in common.

An initiative worthy of particular mention is AMECEA's Pastoral Institute at Eldoret. This Institute offers special opportunities to reflect on the Church's mission to guard and teach ever more effectively the word of God. The Holy Spirit himself is directing the Church in Africa to scrutinize "the signs of the times" in the light of the sacred deposit of God's word as it is proclaimed by the Magisterium. It is only on this sound basis that true answers can be found to the real problems that touch people's lives. It is in judging according to this sacred norm that the Bishops will exercise their personal responsibility to evaluate what pastoral activities and solutions are valid for Africa today.

3. Venerable Brothers, the episcopal ministry is *a ministry at the service of life, bringing the power of the Resurrection to your people*, so that they may "walk in newness of life"^[3], so that they may be ever more aware of the Christian life to which they are called by virtue of their Baptism, and so that in their daily lives - in the setting of Africa - they may have fellowship with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ in the unity of the Holy Spirit. And because this fellowship is fully achieved only in heaven, your ministry likewise involves a clear proclamation of eternal life.

4. As Successor of Peter in the See of Rome and as your brother in the College of Bishops, I have come to Africa *to encourage you in your efforts as pastors of the flock*: in the efforts of each of you to offer to Christ a local Church in which unity reigns between the Bishop and the priests, the religious and the laity; in your efforts to enlighten communities with the Gospel and make them vibrant with the life of Christ; in your efforts to bring the dynamic power of the Resurrection into human life and by it to transform and elevate all levels of society.

I have come to confirm you in your total acceptance of God's holy word as it is authentically proclaimed by the Catholic Church at all times and in all places. I wish to support you in the conviction, so splendidly expressed by the Bishops of Kenya in their Pastoral Letter of 27 April 1979, that fidelity to the teachings of Christ and the Magisterium of his Church is truly in the interests of the people. By following your clear insights of faith you showed yourselves true pastors of the flock, exercising real spiritual leadership when you declared: "We, your Bishops, would do a disservice to the people if we did not expect of them the goodness and the fidelity that they are capable of by the grace of God". Your greatest contribution to your people and to all Africa is indeed the gift of God's word, the acceptance of which is the basis for all community and the condition for all progress.

5. As the *Sersus Servorum Dei* I have come to uphold with you the priorities of your ministry. In the first place I offer my support for your pastoral efforts on behalf of the family - the African family. The great African tradition is faithful to so many family values, and to life itself, which takes its origin in the family. A profound respect for the family and for the good of children is a distinctive

gift of Africa to the world. It is in the family that each generation learns to absorb these values and to transmit them. And the whole Church appreciates everything you do to preserve this heritage of your people, to purify it and uplift it in the sacramental fullness of Christ's new and original teaching.

Hence we see the great value of presenting the Christian family in its relationship to the Most Holy Trinity, and of maintaining the Christian ideal in its evangelical purity. It is the divine law proclaimed by Christ that gives rise to the Christian ideal of monogamous marriage, which in turn is the basis for the Christian family.

Only a week before he died, my predecessor John Paul I spoke to a group of Bishops in these words, which I consider very relevant here today in Africa: "Let us never grow tired of proclaiming the family as a community of love: conjugal love unites the couple and is procreative of new life; it mirrors the divine love, is communicated, and in the words of '*Gaudium et Spes*', is actually a sharing in the covenant of love of Christ and his Church"[4].

Be assured of my solidarity with you in this great task involving the diligent preparation of the young for marriage, the repeated proclamation of the unity and indissolubility of marriage, and the renewed invitation to the faithful to accept and foster with faith and love the Catholic celebration of the sacrament of marriage. Success in a pastoral programme of this nature requires patience and perseverance and a strong conviction that Christ has come to "make all things new"[5].

Know also that in all your efforts to build up strong united families, in which human love reflects divine love and in which the education of children is embraced with a true sense of mission, you have the support of the universal Church. With the love and sensitivity of pastors, you have well illustrated the great principle that any pastoral approach that does not rest on the doctrinal foundation of the word of God is illusory.

Hence with true pastoral charity you have faced various problems affecting human life, and repeated the Church's teaching at the true service of man. You have clearly insisted, for example, on the most fundamental human right: the right to life from the moment of conception; you have effectively reiterated the Church's position on abortion, sterilization and contraception. Your faithful upholding of the Church's teaching contained in the Encyclical "*Humanae Vitae*" has been the expression of your pastoral concern and your profound attachment to the integral values of the human person.

Every effort to make society sensitive to the importance of the family is a great service to humanity.

When the full dignity of parents and children is realized and is expressed in prayer, a new power for good is unleashed throughout the Church and the world. John Paul I expressed this eloquently

when he said: "The holiness of the Christian family is indeed a most apt means for producing the serene renewal of the Church which the Council so eagerly desired. Through family prayer, the *ecclesia domestica* becomes an effective reality and leads to the transformation of the world"[6].

Upon you, Brethren, rest the hope and trust of the universal Church for the defence and promotion of the African family, both parents and children. The Holy Spirit of truth, who has implanted so many values in the hearts of the African people, will never cease to assist you as pastors in bringing the teaching of Jesus ever more effectively into the lives of your brothers and sisters. We need never be afraid to preach the fullness of his message in all its evangelical purity, for, as I stated on another occasion: "Let us never fear that the challenge is too great for our people: they were redeemed by the precious blood of Christ; they are his people. Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ vindicates to himself the final responsibility for the acceptance of his word and for the growth of his Church. It is he, Jesus Christ, who will continue to give the grace to his people to meet the requirements of his word, despite all difficulties, despite all weaknesses. And it is up to us to continue to proclaim the message of salvation in its entirety and purity, with patience, compassion and the conviction that what is impossible with man is possible with God"[7].

6. Another great priority of your ministry is catechesis: developing the initial faith of your people and bringing them to the fullness of Christian life. I am close to you, in praise and encouragement, in every undertaking of yours to communicate Christ, to make his Gospel incarnate in the lives and culture of your people. In union with the universal Church, and in openness to the patrimony of her long history, you are striving to lead your people in the reality of their daily lives to look to Christ for light and strength. The aim of your local Churches is to have the faithful living through, with and in Christ. Your efforts, in which you rightfully endeavour to associate the whole community - and in a special way the catechists - must have constant reference to Christ: to his divine Person, his Spirit, and his Gospel.

The "acculturation" or "inculturation" which you rightly promote will truly be a reflection of the Incarnation of the Word, when a culture, transformed and regenerated by the Gospel, brings forth from its own living tradition original expressions of Christian life, celebration and thought[8]. By respecting, preserving and fostering the particular values and riches of your people's cultural heritage, you will be in a position to lead them to a better understanding of the mystery of Christ, which is to be lived in the noble, concrete and daily experiences of African life. There is no question of adulterating the word of God, or of emptying the Cross of its power[9], but rather of bringing Christ into the very centre of African life and of lifting up all African life to Christ. Thus not only is Christianity relevant to Africa, but Christ, in the members of his Body, is himself African.

7. Again, with good reason, you attribute great pastoral importance to *the proper formation of priests and religious, as well as to fostering these vocations in the Church.* This attitude is an expression of your deep understanding of the needs of the Body of Christ.

Since the beginning of my pontificate I have striven to point out the importance of religious consecration in the Church and the value of religious life as it affects the whole community of the faithful. Religious have the task of showing forth the holiness of the whole Body of Christ and of bearing witness to a new and eternal life acquired by the Redemption of Christ^[10]. At the same time they are called to many different apostolates in the Church. Their service in the Gospel is very necessary for the life of the Church. Missionary Religious in Kenya have laboured with great fidelity in the cause of the Gospel; only the Lord Jesus can adequately thank them and reward them for what has been accomplished for the implantation of the Church. Their mission now goes on side by side with their Kenyan fellow Religious, who have heard the call of Christ and are working generously for the cause of the Gospel. The future of evangelization in this land will continue to owe much to the men and women Religious, both autochthonous and from abroad.

I have likewise sought to draw attention to the essential nature, role and function of the priesthood in its unchanging relationship to the Eucharist, which is the summit of all evangelization^[11].

In particular I wish to confirm the vital importance for the Christian people of having their priests properly trained in the word of God, in the knowledge and love of Jesus Christ and his Cross. In the divine plan, the transmission of the life-giving Gospel of Christ is linked with the preparation of the priests of this generation. To provide this proper seminary training is one of our greatest responsibilities as Bishops of the Church of God; it can be one of our most effective contributions to the evangelization of the world.

8. An important element that affects every community in the Church is *the unity and cooperation between Bishops and priests*. By reason of his ordination, the priest is "a co-worker with the Order of Bishop", and to live out the truth of this vocation he is called to collaborate with the Bishop and to pray for him. To explain the unity of the priests with the Bishop, Saint Ignatius of Antioch compared it to the relationship between the strings and the lute.^[12]

On the part of the Bishop this relationship requires that he should be close to his priests as a brother and father and friend. As such he must love them and encourage them, not only in their pastoral activities, but in their lives of personal consecration. The Bishop is called to strengthen his priests in faith and to urge them to look constantly to Christ the Good Shepherd, in order that they may realize ever more their priestly identity and dignity.

The Church renews her debt of gratitude to all the missionary and "*Fidei Donum*" priests who are labouring in the cause of Christ's Gospel. Their generosity is an expression of the power of Christ's grace, and their ministry is a great proof of Catholic unity.

9. In the building up of the Church I am aware of your sustained work *to build small Christian communities* in which the word of God is the guideline of action and in which the Eucharist is the true centre of life. The whole community of the faithful benefits from these initiatives that make it

possible for people to recognize the Church in her concrete expression and human dimension as a visible sacrament of God's universal love and saving grace. It is certainly the will of Jesus Christ that the love of Christians should be manifested in such a way that individual communities exemplify the universal norm: "By this will all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another"[13]. In your pastoral zeal you know the wise criteria laid down by Paul VI and which remain a sure guide for the effectiveness of these communities[14]. At this time I would just stress the great power which those communities have to fulfil an active ecclesial role in the evangelization of Africa.

May they go forward with you, their pastors, and with the priests, to communicate "the unsearchable riches of Christ"[15].

10. Before concluding my words to you today, my dear Brethren in Christ Jesus, I wish to emphasize once more the great need for holiness in our lives. To exercise fruitfully our role as pastors of God's people, we must know Christ and love him. In a word, we are called to friendship with the Lord, just as the Apostles were. Like Jesus we are the object of the Father's love and the Holy Spirit is alive in our hearts. *The effectiveness of everything we do depends on our union with Jesus*, on our holiness of life. There is no other way to be a worthy Bishop, a good Shepherd of the flock. There is no pastoral leadership without prayer, for only in prayer is union with Jesus maintained. Only by being like Jesus, Son of Mary, who is the Mother of us all, can we fulfil our mission to the Church.

May Mary Queen of Apostles sustain you in holiness and love, in prayer and pastoral charity, and help you to bring Jesus to all your people, to all Kenya, to all Africa.

Praised be Jesus Christ, "the chief Shepherd"[16] of God's people, "the Bishop and Shepherd of our souls"[17].

[1] *Jn* 11:25.

[2] *Acts* 4:33.

[3] *Rom* 6:4.

[4] AAS 71 (1979), p. 766.

[5] *Rev* 21:5.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 777.

[7] AAS 71 (1979), p. 1424.

[8] Cf. *Catechesi Tradendae*, 53.

[9] Cf. *1 ir* 1:17.

[10] Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 44.

[11] Cf. *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 5.

[12] Letter to the Ephesians, IV.

[13] *Jn* 13:35.

[14] Cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 58.

[15] *Eph* 3:8.

[16] *1 Pt* 5:4.

[17] *1 Pt* 2:25.

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