



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS OF ZAMBIA ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Thursday 5 May, 1988

Dear Brothers in our Lord Jesus Christ,

1. I have been pleased to meet individually with each of you, the Bishops of the Zambia Episcopal Conference, on the occasion of your *ad limina* visit and now I join together with all of you in this *moment of collegial communion*. Our assembly today calls to mind that it was the will of the Lord Jesus that Peter and the other Apostles form a college. We are gathered here as their successors in the bonds of unity, charity and peace (Cfr. *Lumen Gentium*, 22).

I wish to express my gratitude for the kind words of greeting which you have conveyed on behalf of your priests, Religious and laity. Each of you represents in a special way the local Church entrusted to your care and thus I wish to offer through you my cordial greetings to all the People of God in Zambia. Repeating the words of the Apostle Paul, "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all, making my prayer with joy, thankful for your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now" (*Phil.* 1, 3-5).

As shepherds of the local Churches in Zambia you have come "to see Peter" (*Gal.* 1, 18) and together with him to renew once again *your profession of faith in Jesus*, "for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (*Act.* 4, 12). In the name of Jesus and through the Holy Spirit we give thanks and praise to the Father for the many graces and blessings bestowed on the Church in Zambia since the first missionaries preached the Gospel and planted the seed of the faith in many hearts.

2. It is with joy that I have learned of the preparations now under way to celebrate in 1991 the centenary of the arrival of the Catholic faith in your region of Africa. For the years leading up to the

jubilee you have chosen as a theme: “The Formation of Adult Christians, Truly African in Families and in Small Christian Communities”. Your choice of this theme emphasizes the *urgent pastoral priority* for the Church in Zambia to *form lay leaders*. Moreover it echoes a concern which was repeatedly expressed during the last Synod of Bishops on the Vocation and Mission of the Laity. In their concluding message addressed to the People of God the Synod Fathers state: “There exists everywhere among the lay faithful a real thirst for the interior life, a thirst for a deeper spirituality, and a fervent desire to share in the missionary and apostolic work of the Church... The integral spiritual formation of all the faithful, lay, religious and clergy, should be a pastoral priority today” (SYNODI EPISC. 1987 *Nuntius ad Populum Dei*, 12).

In this central endeavour of the formation of lay leaders for the future of the Church in Zambian society, I note the particular emphasis which you are giving to “*small Christian communities*” as a means of improving the full and active participation of the faithful as well as their catechesis. These communities provide a setting for sharing more intensely in the Church’s life. They can also be useful in uniting the People of God in order to meditate upon the Word of God and to celebrate the sacraments. Thus they offer the important opportunity of forming adult Christians, deepening their faith through catechesis, prayer and fraternal charity. At the same time the “small Christian communities” must always remain a part of your local Churches and never become isolated. In this way they will fulfil their most fundamental vocation and themselves become proclaimers of the Gospel (Cfr. PAULI VI *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 58).

3. It is my fervent prayer that you will renew your efforts in the great task of evangelization which constitutes the essential mission of the Church. I wish to praise all the courageous initiatives that you have already undertaken for proclaiming the Gospel and I am aware of the many difficulties which you must face in communicating the Good News of salvation to many who have not yet heard of or accepted Christ. The Church exists in order to evangelize and you are called to lead your flocks in giving daily witness to Christ in a society where many are in search of a fuller understanding of God and of his designs for the human family.

Your dedicated witness of an exemplary Christian life constitutes an initial act of evangelization but it must be accompanied by the explicit proclamation of the Kingdom of God and *the person of Jesus Christ*, who by his Cross and Resurrection won for us our eternal salvation. This clear message of salvation in Christ is the foundation of all the Church’s attempts at evangelization. And as you well know, the proclamation of the Gospel and the courageous witness of Christian life need to be sustained by continual prayer, ever more fervent participation in the sacraments and personal sacrifice.

4. My dear Brothers: I wish to emphasize the important role of *the Christian family*, the “domestic Church”, in evangelizing society and in building up the Kingdom of God. There already exists in your culture a deep sense of the family bond, which can be perfected and can greatly foster the Christian vision of married life as a community of love.

The family has a special role *in transmitting the Gospel*. In a family all the members are called to evangelize and to be evangelized. The parents through their love and example share the Gospel with their children, but they in turn are affected by their children living the same Gospel. Truly Christian families have an influence on other families and become an important means for the evangelization of their own neighbourhoods.

Even in situations where the proclamation of the truth about Christian marriage is difficult and the breakdown of the family risks assuming serious proportions, we can never grow tired of asserting that marriage is “a mutual gift of two persons”, and that “this intimate union, as well as the good of children, imposes total fidelity on the spouses and argues for an unbreakable oneness between them”.

The youth should hold a special place in your many pastoral concerns. The Church in Zambia on both the diocesan and national levels is called to commit herself ever more willingly to her young people lest they become estranged from Gospel values. The apostolate to youth through religious education and personal witness must aim at deepening young people’s faith. New and effective forms of the youth apostolate need to be discovered so that ever greater numbers of young people can be drawn to active participation in the Church.

5. In all your local Churches there is an increase of *candidates for the priesthood*. In addition to the seven minor seminaries, I am pleased to know that you have recently established the Emmaus Spirituality Centre where the seminarians spend a year in spiritual formation before they study Philosophy at Saint Augustine’s Major Seminary in Mpima and then go to do their theological studies at Saint Dominic’s Major Seminary in Lusaka.

In large measure the future of the Church in Zambia depends on the dedication of her *priests* to the service of the People of God in communion of faith and pastoral zeal with their Bishops. It is your responsibility to ensure that your seminarians receive an adequate *spiritual, academic and pastoral formation* for the priesthood. I offer you my prayerful support in this endeavour of priestly formation which is essential to the Church’s mission and I know that with active and loving concern you will always be true fathers in Christ to your seminarians (Cfr. *Optatam Totius*, 5).

At this time I wish to express my fraternal affection for all the priests, both Zambian and from elsewhere, who actively collaborate with you in shepherding the flock of Christ entrusted to your care. An essential aspect of your apostolic charge is to strengthen your brother priests in faith and to confirm them in their identity as “other Christs”, who offer their lives in union with Christ for the salvation of the world. The ministerial priesthood is most clearly expressed in the proclamation of the Gospel and in the celebration of the Eucharistic Sacrifice. A priest obtains in the Eucharist and in the frequent reception of the Sacrament of Penance the strength to make the daily offering of his life as well as the grace needed to remain faithful to his promise of celibacy.

It is also important that you strive to be true brothers to your priests. If you are, you will know the special burdens which trouble them and you will with compassion and understanding try to help them and if necessary offer fraternal correction as well as call them to obedience (Cfr. PAULI VI *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, 92).

Young priests need special attention on the part of the Bishop in their first years of pastoral ministry. Besides the normal difficulties which they experience in beginning their new life as priests, their adjustment is made even more difficult by the isolation in which they sometimes find themselves without the support of other brother priests. Much can be done to remedy these problems by providing opportunities for priests to meet and to continue their spiritual and theological formation.

I cannot fail to mention the members of *Institutes of consecrated life* which constitute for the Church an indispensable element in the great task of evangelization. Their dedication to health care, education and social work has helped to attract numerous vocations and I encourage you to express the great esteem that the Church has for them in their vocation of consecrated love. It is important that Bishops take an active interest in the Religious present in their Dioceses, and that in full respect for their special charism they involve them in pastoral planning on both the national and diocesan levels. The presence of Religious in your local Churches offers a “sign of contradiction” to any who would try to portray the Christian vocation as an easy or worldly endeavour.

6. I acknowledge with satisfaction that the Church in Zambia enjoys today ample freedom in the field of *social communications* and I encourage you to intensify your efforts in making ever greater use of these important means of evangelization. There need to be well-trained individuals in the fields of radio, television and the press who can present clearly the teachings of the Church and respond to questions concerning Christian faith and morality, including social justice.

You have made much progress in *ecumenical dialogue* and today you enjoy cordial relations with the Anglican Communion and the other Ecclesial Communities present in Zambia. The document entitled “Christian Liberation, Justice and Development” which you recently published in collaboration with the Christian Council of Zambia and the Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia offers hope of increasing ecumenical collaboration between the different Communities in your country. It gives an analysis of the socio-economic crisis which Zambia is undergoing at the present time and which calls Christians to work strenuously for the promotion of development, social justice and liberation from all forms of oppression.

7. I am deeply concerned about the large number of *refugees*, principally from Angola and Mozambique, who have come to your country seeking safety, food and shelter. I commend you in all the initiatives which you have undertaken to provide for their physical and spiritual well-being. You are endeavouring to alleviate the sufferings of these people. Besides responding to their

immediate needs, you must provide for their spiritual assistance as well. It is my fervent prayer that the international community will continue to respond generously in helping you to meet the difficult problem of refugees in your region.

I thank all of you, dear Brothers, for your dedication as pastors of the Lord's flock. I commend each of you to the intercession of Mary, who believed that the Lord's promises to her would be fulfilled (Cfr. *Luc.* 1, 45). And in the love of Jesus her Son I impart my Apostolic Blessing to you and to your clergy, Religious and laity.

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