



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO ZIMBABWE, BOTSWANA, LESOTHO, SWAZILAND AND MOZAMBIQUE

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE PRIESTS, MEN AND WOMEN RELIGIOUS AND THE SEMINARIANS OF ZIMBABWE

*Cathedral of Bulawayo
Monday, 12 September 1988*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

1. I greet you with the words of Saint Paul: "I am so proud of you that... I am filled with consolation and my joy is overflowing" (2Cor. 7, 4).

This is indeed a moment of great joy for me, to meet you, the priests, the men and women religious, and the seminarians of Zimbabwe. In each one of you I see the great mystery of God's love. To you the Lord has spoken as in the Book of Leviticus: "Be consecrated to me, because I, the Lord, am holy and I will set you apart from all these peoples so that you may be mine" (Lev. 20, 26). Your lives are rooted in that divine call and your confidence is in the One who sustains your ministry and witness. "His faithful love endures for ever" (Ps. 118, 1).

Here in Saint Mary's Cathedral in Bulawayo, with the west window over the altar depicting the Immaculate Conception and scenes from the life of the Mother of God, I wish to share these moments with *you in the spirit of Mary's song of praise*: "Holy is his name, and his mercy reaches from age to age" (Luc. 1, 49-50).

2. Brother *priests*: the theme of my visit to Zimbabwe is also the challenge of your priestly ministry: "coming together in Christ", coming together in the Christian community, through reconciliation. It is your task to build up your parishes and each local Church in fidelity to the *word*

of God, above all by breaking the *Bread of life* for your, people and by involving them in *works of faith and service* (Cfr. *Act. 2, 42*).

In order to do this you yourselves are first called to intimate union with the Lord. You must be men of God, accustomed to prayer and self-giving, humble of heart yet courageous in proclaiming the word “in season and out of season” (Cfr. *2Tim. 4, 2*). You must be true spiritual fathers and guides of your people. You must be brothers to each other in every difficulty.

One of the outstanding characteristics of African people is that they cherish family relationships. Accordingly, in this cultural context the Church must appear ever more clearly as *the family of God's beloved children*. Exactly a year ago, during my visit to the United States, I spoke of the parish as the “family of families”, “our family in the Church... in which there are no strangers or aliens” (Ioannis Pauli PP. II “*Allocutio ad communitatem catholicam ispanicam, in urbe Antoniopolis habita*”, 9, die 13 sept. 1987: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II, X, 3* [1987] 491). It is your task, my brothers, to instil this family spirit into your parishes and Small Christian Communities, by being yourselves a reflection of God's fatherly love for his people.

The *presbyterium* too should be a family of many brothers under the bishop, “co-workers in the same undertaking” (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 8). Occasions to pray together, study together and share the experiences of your priestly life and work are a necessary part of your lives. How beautiful when you welcome one another into your houses with the peace of Christ in your hearts! How important it is that you support each other through prayer, and with helpful advice and discernment!

3. The renewal in ecclesial life which the Second Vatican Council advocated has certainly, in spite of difficulties and some misunderstandings, produced abundant spiritual fruits in the life of the Church. This renewal has to be clearly evident in the ministry of priests who are called to guide and animate it. Among the more important gifts which the Holy Spirit has bestowed on the Church through the Council is the greater awareness of *the universal call to holiness of life*. Your ministry cannot be understood apart from your own sharing in the divine life, apart from prayer and penance, apart from self-giving, charity and justice. And the fruit of your ministry is to foster these things in the lives of your people. Indeed, you find nourishment for your own spiritual life in pastoral leadership and activity (Cfr. *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 14).

Under the guidance of the Council, the laity are acquiring a more precise understanding of their baptismal grace and their role in the priestly People of God. They show an ever greater thirst for God's word and they look to the Church's spiritual, theological and social doctrine to enlighten them in their everyday lives. Many of them yearn for a more responsible role in parish life, in liturgical activities, in catechesis and in service to those in need. In all of this *your spiritual leadership* is tested. Your proclamation of the word of God must provide them with ever more solid spiritual nourishment; it should be the result of your own study and prayerful meditation. Your

teaching must clearly reflect the Church's response to the increasingly complex questions raised by modern life. In Saint Matthew's Gospel, Isaiah's description of the suffering servant is applied to Jesus, and it can be applied to each one of you: "I will endow him with my spirit, and he will proclaim the true faith to the nations... He will not break the crushed reed, nor put out the smouldering wick till he has led the truth to victory" (*Matth.* 12, 18-20).

4. As the people of Zimbabwe and of the whole of Southern Africa strive for *reconciliation and brotherhood*, I pray that you as priests will exercise the special charism of being able to reconcile your people and "bring them together in Christ". You well know that before there can be genuine and lasting reconciliation there has to be a conversion, that change of heart which is brought about by willing acceptance of its real consequences in personal and social life.

The ministry of reconciliation is above all a struggle against sin and evil. In administering *the Sacrament of Penance*, you are entrusted with the spiritual power to loose and bind. If you yourselves appreciate the blessings of this sacrament you will be better able to convey this deep appreciation to the faithful, who nowadays often need more personal attention and more patient listening on the part of the confessor. In each country I visit I appeal to the priests to make themselves as available as possible to those who wish to be freed from sin and renewed in grace, to be reconciled with the Lord and with the Church. And I make this same appeal to you: love this sacrament and receive it often.

My brother priests, the presence of God's kingdom in Zimbabwe makes itself felt especially through the power and truth of your ministry, centred on the Eucharist. Therefore I earnestly encourage you to be ever more conformed to Christ, and to draw the spiritual resources you need for "shouldering the sacred task of the Gospel" (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 2) from your daily sharing in Christ's Paschal Mystery. May you always cherish Mary as the Mother of your vocation and the perfect example of discipleship and service.

5. *Men and women religious of Zimbabwe!* You too are bound to Christ by a unique relationship. You have received a special sharing in Christ's consecration of himself to the Father for the sake of mankind (Cfr. *Io.* 17, 19). It is a consecration which he fulfilled through his Death and Resurrection and which you realize in a specific way by fulfilling his words: "He who loses his life for my sake will find it" (*Matth* 10, 39).

In a letter to all consecrated persons which I wrote during the recently completed Marian Year, I sought to emphasize something which is at the heart of religious life, namely, the positive significance of dying with Christ in order to share in his Resurrection. I said that what is fundamental for a human being - man or woman - is precisely this: "finding oneself in Christ, since Christ is the 'whole fullness'(Cfr. Col. 2, 9)' (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Epistula Apostolica ad omnes personas consecratas communitatum religiosarum et institutorum saecularium Anno Mariali vertente*, III, die 22 maii 1988: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, XI, 1 [1988] 1595)". To the

extent that you “find yourselves in Christ”, the maturity of your faith and charity will make you his prophetic witnesses in each local Church and before the world. In this way you will effectively proclaim the eternal value of Christ’s saving message.

6. It is your special calling to bear public witness, through your way of life, to the “newness of life” which the Incarnate Son of God introduced into human affairs (Cfr. *Rom.* 6, 4). You bear this witness in the concrete historical circumstances of present-day Zimbabwe and contemporary Africa, which have an urgent need for a renewed humanism, expressed in a culture which defends life and promotes human solidarity, to be built on the best traditions of this continent in dialogue with the perennial and universal truths revealed in Jesus Christ.

Your religious consecration, manifested through the observance of the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience and made fruitful in the many activities of your religious institutes, is inseparable from the Church’s evangelizing and sanctifying mission. Your consecration will have little sense without a profound love of the Church as God’s chosen instrument for the salvation of mankind. Jesus says: “I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full” (*Io.* 10, 10). All of us, the Successor of Peter and each one of you, must consider ourselves in the first place as apostles sent to proclaim the “life” which God offers in Christ Jesus. To reduce the “Good News” to anything less would be to diminish the very potential for transformation which the Spirit generates in the Church and of which your consecrated life is a clear witness and powerful instrument.

7. Religious life is the countersign to those tendencies towards selfish and excessive individualism, towards greed and ruthless competition which are among the factors that hinder authentic human development here in Africa and elsewhere. Religious life educates you to be especially sensitive to the needs of the poor, the disadvantaged, the sick and the handicapped, and of those left behind by progress.

In your service to others in towns or rural areas, in hospitals and schools in social services and charitable activities, you are not just serving the material development of your people, *you are also upholding their human dignity*. You treat others as God’s sons and daughters, made in his likeness. You serve them as Christ’s beloved brothers and sisters.

Here, I would like you to reflect on the fact that certain well-tried forms of apostolate, such as education and health care, are a most effective way of defending and promoting human rights because they defend the human person from the basic indignity of ignorance and abandonment. I wish to encourage you, especially the religious Sisters to persevere in these endeavours in fidelity to the charisms which the Holy Spirit has bestowed on your institutes.

8. My dear Sisters: as consecrated women you have a most profound effect on the way *the Gospel is incorporated into local culture*. Very often you “vivify” a Christian community from its very roots, stimulating and accompanying its growth in a way that is not open to others. The work of the

first courageous women religious in this region has left an indelible mark on the Church here.

Let us praise God together for the selfless service of the many expatriate Sisters who have brought untold blessings upon the Church in this land. Theirs is a significant testimony of the universality of Christian love. And the Zimbabwean-born Sisters are the blossoming forth of the divine gift which the Church in this land has received from her Lord: "like branches sprouting out wondrously and abundantly (they) form a tree growing in the field of the Lord from a seed divinely planted" (*Lumen Gentium*, 43). This particular seed was planted almost a hundred years ago, when after a long and hazardous journey the first Dominican Sisters entered this area, and it has not ceased to give the finest fruits ever since.

I wish to say a special word of encouragement to the Poor Clares who have established a community in Harare, the first of its kind in Zimbabwe. *The contemplative life is an integral part of the life of every particular Church.* The presence of these Sisters is a sign of a maturing community of faith, and they deserve the respect and love due to their special vocation. I pray that there may be many Zimbabwean vocations to the contemplative life, which the Council calls "the glory of the Church and an overflowing fountain of heavenly graces" (*Perfectae Caritatis*, 7).

9. Dear religious Brothers: your faithfulness and prayerfulness are of vital importance to the Church, and the service you render is indispensable. Your example as conscientious administrators, technical instructors and skilled artisans, demonstrating the dignity of work, is of immense value to a developing country which cannot progress unless it holds workers in high esteem. The example of your joyous following of Christ and your industrious pastoral service is a source of encouragement to many. I invite the Church in Zimbabwe to promote vocations to the brotherhood without any fear that this will divert vocations from the priesthood, for it is the Lord who calls where and when he wishes.

I also offer a special greeting to all *the seminarians* and candidates to religious life in Zimbabwe. Always give thanks to God who gives you this opportunity to discern in faith and trust *the calling which is the reason for your special place in the Church.* Remember it is a call to service and holiness of life. It means detachment from material things, and the practice of all the Christian virtues, especially chastity, love of neighbour and zeal for the salvation of souls. Place your trust in the Lord: *he is your Shepherd, he guides you along the right path; he is true to his name* (*Ps.* 23(22), 1. 3).

10. Dear priests and religious: the cost of discipleship is never small. Here in Bulawayo, I recall the memory of the first bishop of this diocese, Adolph Schmitt, and of the other priests, religious sisters and brothers, and lay people who lost their lives in the difficult years of the struggle for independence, or as the result of more recent acts of violent aggression. May their sacrifice inspire the entire Church in this land to "press forward amid the persecutions of the world and the consolations of God, announcing the Cross and Resurrection of the Lord until he comes" (*Lumen*

Gentium, 8). I entrust you all to Our Lady, Queen of Peace, whose shrine nearby is a reminder that true peace comes as a gift from the heart of our loving God.

May the peace of Christ be with you all!

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