



The Holy See

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

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE PRIESTS, RELIGIOUS AND LAITY

*Cathedral of Gaborone, Botswana
Tuesday, 13 September 1988*

Dear Bishop Setlalekgosi,

Dear Brothers and Sisters of the Diocese of Gaborone,

1. It is a great joy, for me to make this pastoral visit to your country and to meet all of you. I wish to express cordial greetings also to those who have come from other African nations, particularly from the Republic of South Africa. It is fitting that the Church in Botswana should be represented here by members of the clergy, religious and laity. In communion with your bishop and with the Successor of Peter, you constitute a young and dynamic local Church. There is within your ranks a diversity of graces, ministries and works, but all these are brought into the unity of one body – the Body of Christ – by the power of the Holy Spirit. As the Second Vatican Council teaches us, “In the Church there is diversity of ministry but unity of mission” (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 2). All have a part to play in bringing Christ to the world.

In the reading we heard a few moments ago, Saint Paul speaks of his special calling as an Apostle and his ministry as a preacher of the Gospel. He refers to his work as a “duty” and a “responsibility”, for the sake of which he makes himself “all things to all men in order to save some at any cost” (Cfr. *1Cor.* 9, 16-23). And earlier in the same chapter he tells the Corinthians: “You are all my work in the Lord... you are the seal of my apostolate” (*Ibid.* 9, 1-2).

2. It is within the context of the diversity of ministries in the Church, and of the special calling given to Saint Paul, that I wish to address my brothers and sisters who are priests or religious.

Dears friends: You are the spiritual heirs of Saint Paul and of all those missionaries who have given themselves without reserve in order to make Christ and his Church known and loved among the peoples of Africa. For the past *sixty years*, the Church in Botswana has been built up by the apostolic love and fervour of missionaries who have earned a warm and lasting remembrance in the hearts of the people of this country. These servants of the Gospel were men and women of faith whose lives confirm the tribute paid to religious in the Apostolic Exhortation “*Evangelii Nuntiandi*”: “By virtue of their religious consecration they are particularly free and willing to leave all things and go to the ends of the earth to preach the Gospel. They are always full of courage in their work, and their apostolate is often outstanding in its admirable resourcefulness and initiative. They are generous and are often to be found in the most remote mission stations where they may have to endure great dangers to health and even to life. Without doubt, the Church is *greatly indebted* to them” (Pauli VI *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 69).

The reality described by Pope Paul VI serves as a constant challenge to new generations of priests and religious who also wish to leave all things and follow in the footsteps of Christ. Inspired by the example of those who have gone before you, you too wish to *bear abundant fruit in the Church of today and the future*.

3. At this time, I would like to address a special word to *my brothers in the priesthood*. Like Saint Paul, you are servants of Christ and ministers of the Gospel. Through the Sacrament of Holy Orders, you have been set apart to *act in his very person and to serve the priestly People of God*. In fulfilling this task, strive in a special way to help the *laity* of Botswana come to appreciate more deeply the importance of the *contribution they make* to the Church’s mission. By living an active Christian life in the world, they bear witness to God’s Kingdom and build up the Body of Christ. Particularly through the vitality of family life they make an invaluable contribution to the Church’s mission.

The ordained priesthood and the priesthood of all the baptized *converge* in the *celebration of the Eucharistic Sacrifice*, which the Council describes as “the source and summit of all Christian life” (*Lumen Gentium*, 11). As I once wrote: “The priest fulfils his principal mission and is manifested in all his fullness when he celebrates the Eucharist, and this manifestation is more complete when he himself allows the depth of that mystery to become visible, so that it alone shines forth in people’s hearts and minds, through his ministry” (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Dominicae Cenaе*, 2). Dear brothers, may we always centre our lives on this great mystery of faith which *reveals* to us the *true meaning* of our priestly vocation and is at the very heart of all our service to Christ and his Church.

I know that it is not always possible for you to celebrate the Eucharist with the faithful every Sunday. For that reason dedicated Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist are available for communion services, and I wish to commend them for their generosity and faith. At the same time, it is important that *sound catechesis* be given concerning the extraordinary nature of these services in relation to the Mass in order to ensure that the supreme value of the Eucharistic

Sacrifice be not diminished.

Your task as brothers and collaborators with the bishop in shepherding the People of God also requires that you be “instructors in the faith” (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 6). In fulfilling this important responsibility, you necessarily rely on the generous collaboration of the many lay catechists in Botswana and you give them needed guidance and support. This is not meant to limit your own ministry of the word but to make it more effective and fruitful. Together with the lay catechists, may you always experience the joy of bringing your people *to know and embrace the fullness of truth in Christ*.

The priest, my brothers, always has *an essential and personal role* in the ministry of “Word and Sacrament”. Many other demands are made on your time and energy, but it is especially in doing what is most essential to the priesthood that you find the *encouragement, strength and satisfaction* needed to persevere. May your daily prayer, too, bring joy to your ministry, so that the “peace of God which is so much greater than we can understand, will guard your hearts and your thoughts, in Christ Jesus” (*Phil.* 4, 7).

4. I also wish to share some reflections with my *brothers and sisters in religious life*. Dear friends, while all the baptized share in the Church’s mission, the Lord Jesus has called you to bear public witness to the Gospel in a way that sets you apart. Your religious consecration is a special source of spiritual vitality for the Church. It gives rise to a way of life that serves the People of God precisely by its fidelity to a particular charism and spiritual heritage. However, as I have said on other occasions, “even though the many different apostolic works that you perform are extremely important, nevertheless the *truly fundamental* work of the apostolate remains *always what* (and at the same time who) *you are* in the Church” (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Redemptionis Donum*, 15).

The Church depends on you to bear public witness to the radical demands of the Gospel, demands which are in danger of being obscured or ignored in today’s world. That is why the religious habit is not without value in your apostolic service. Above all, the Church needs the joyful witness of your consecrated chastity, poverty and obedience. Your call entails a share in the “folly of the Cross”, which will always remain a stumbling block to unbelievers, but in your own heart you know that the Cross is truly the power and wisdom of God at work in those who believe (Cfr. *1Cor.* 1, 18 ss.). Thus, your love for the Crucified Lord is the basis of your vocation; your lives must be centred in him.

At the foot of the Cross, beside the Mother of our Redeemer, you will also see the cost of *our reconciliation with God and with one another*. For, as Saint Paul says, those “that used to be so far apart from us have been brought very close, *by the blood of Christ*” (*Eph.* 2, 13). Meditating on this great mystery, you will come to know more certainly that each of you and your whole communities must be *servants of this reconciliation in the world*, servants who can bring healing and peace to others because they have first of all experienced it themselves, especially through prayer and the

Sacrament of Penance.

By the *vow of chastity* you have become special *heralds of the Resurrection of Christ and of the promise of eternal life*. You lift people's eyes beyond the demands of worldly affairs and the press of daily tasks, reminding them of the things that truly last. And yet, for the vow of chastity to be a compelling sign of the Kingdom to come, it must be inspired by a concrete *love for every one of God's children*. You are to "follow Christ by loving as he loved you, giving himself up in our place as a fragrant offering and a sacrifice to God" (*Ibid.* 5, 2). By doing so you proclaim to the world that "God is love" (*1Jo.* 4, 16), for his glory and for the salvation of all.

Your *vow of poverty* also proceeds from the love of God. With Saint Paul you can say: "For him I have accepted the loss of everything, ...if only I can have Christ and be given a place in him" (*Phil.* 3, 8-9). Detachment from material things enables you to be more receptive to the prompting of the Holy Spirit and more ready to receive his gifts. Through the practice of poverty, your lives stand as an *appeal for greater sharing* of the earth's resources, in a world in which relatively few people live in prosperity while many more struggle for the basic necessities of life.

The Second Vatican Council exhorts all religious to support the poor and to love them with the deep yearning of Christ. This theme was developed further by my predecessor Paul VI. For example, he said that the "cry of the poor" bars religious from whatever would be a compromise with any form of social injustice (Cfr. Pauli VI *Evangelica Testificatio*, 18). I know that this teaching strikes a responsive chord in your hearts, because you have witnessed *the plight of those who are subjected by law to discrimination*. And I gladly support you in your desire to be close to those who are unjustly deprived of their legitimate rights and lack decent living conditions. It is only fitting that, as followers of our Crucified Saviour, you would make great efforts to be in *solidarity with the poor and oppressed*.

And, then, there is your *vow of obedience*, by which you have entrusted yourselves completely to God's designs in intimation of the Son of God who "humbled himself, even to accepting death, death on a cross" (*Phil.* 2, 8). You promised obedience to the Lord out of a firm conviction that God's plan for you is a plan of love. You were convinced that the best possible thing for you and for others is the faithful fulfilment of his will. In its concrete implementation this means the discernment of God's will within your religious community and *total openness and availability to the Holy Spirit* in the service of God's people. Through obedience you seek to lose your life in union with Christ and for the sake of the Gospel, precisely so that you may find your life through him (Cfr. *Matth.* 16, 25). A mature understanding of religious obedience prompts you to heed Christ's voice, even when it may seem that the path indicated is not the best for your own self-fulfilment or the use of your talents. But to those who love God, *all things work together unto good* (Cfr. *Rom.* 8, 28). Faith teaches us that "God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength" (*1Cor.* 1, 25).

5. Finally, I wish to address all the *lay men and women* who are present. Through you I greet all the Catholic laity of Botswana, “who have been chosen, by the provident purpose of God the Father, to be made holy by the Spirit, obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood” (*1Petr.* 1, 2). Each of you is called to exercise an important role in the mission of the Church by participating in the Eucharist and receiving the sacraments, by praying and offering thanksgiving, and by living a holy life marked by self-denial and an active charity towards others (Cfr. *Lumen Gentium*, 10). You share in a mission of “love and life” by being faithful to the duties of marriage and the family (Cfr. Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Familiaris Consortio*, 50). You transform the world and sanctify it from within by bringing the Gospel to public life and to the work place (Cfr. *Lumen Gentium*, 31).

Many of you also collaborate directly in the Church’s ministry as *catechists*, extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist, and in other forms of service, especially to the sick and the needy. This too is a great blessing for the whole People of God. With Saint Paul I urge you: “Never grow tired of doing good because... in due time we shall reap our harvest. While we have the chance, we must do good to all, especially to our brothers in the faith” (Cfr. *Gal.* 6, 9-10).

6. Dear brothers and sisters, priests, religious and laity of Botswana and Southern Africa: the whole Church has great love and esteem for you. She rejoices at what God is accomplishing in and through you. In your moments of discouragement and trial, never doubt that the Lord is near you. For he has called you by name. You are his. Trust in God to give you the grace you need to build up the Body of Christ through love and sacrifice.

May the grace and peace of our Risen Saviour reign in your hearts. To all of you I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.