



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE 12th MEETING
OF THE POST-SYNODAL COUNCIL
OF THE GENERAL SECRETARIAT OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS
FOR THE SPECIAL ASSEMBLY FOR AFRICA**

Tuesday, 15 June 2004

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,

1. While you are gathered for the 12th meeting of the Post-Synodal Council of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops for the Special Assembly for Africa, I address a cordial greeting to each one of you in this blessed season that follows the *Solemnity of Corpus Christi*.

This Post-Synodal Council, appointed 10 years ago by the Synod Fathers at the end of the Special Assembly for Africa, has on various occasions encouraged the Bishops of Africa in their effort to put into practice the conclusions of the Synod, contained in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa*. Indeed, by meeting regularly, you are able to review the achievements, projects and progress made by the local African Churches, which are especially praiseworthy and deserving of admiration, given that the political and socio-economic situations are for the most part deplorably unfavourable even if there may be some comforting signs in them.

This is the reason why I once again renew my gratitude to you for the important work you do in the name of episcopal collegiality. Indeed, you constantly offer the Successor of Peter enlightened advice, based on your pastoral experience of the situation in the Church and in society on the African Continent.

2. I described the First Special Assembly as "a Synod of Resurrection and Hope" (*Ecclesia in Africa*, n. 13), and so indeed it was, since it was already possible to glimpse here and there the first signs of this new flowering. Unfortunately, however, the Continent seems to be experiencing

neither truce nor lasting peace. In addition to international conflicts are the endemic hotbeds of conflict that sow terror and devastation among the peoples whose only aspiration is to live in peace, rediscovered at last.

In addition, other scourges come to afflict Africa and Africans: poverty that derives both from a compromised economic situation as well as from the difficult conditions in the areas of education and health care. In this regard, how could we fail to mention the social scourge of AIDS or the insecurity due to conflicts, latent or being fought out, and lastly, the corruption that still beleaguers too many levels of civil society? All of this makes up the vicious circle that causes gangrene in this young and vigorous body.

To break the links of these new chains requires the joint effort of all the vital forces of society and particularly of the Church, which are already at work and intervene at every level with self-denial and dedication. For her part, the universal Church, faithful to her prophetic role for Africa, has already reminded the great world leaders of five priorities in order to restore to Africans what has been taken from them, often with violence: respect for life and religious differences, the eradication of poverty, the end of arms trafficking, the resolution of conflicts and action with a view to development, motivated by solidarity.

3. Our hope, of course, is strong because it is rooted in Christ and draws vigour and inspiration from him. The Special Assembly for Africa stressed the family dimension of the Church, insisting on the notion of the Church as God's family, and in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa* I took up this beautiful expression of the divine fatherhood, which is so meaningful. In this "family" context, it seems to me to be important to recall the need for authentic fraternal reconciliation, after the wounds inflicted by the hostilities that still poison interpersonal, interethnic and international relations in the different regions of Africa.

Has not the time come to deepen this African synodal experience, for which many Pastors of Africa have been pressing? The exceptional growth of the Church in Africa, the rapid succession of Pastors, the new challenges that the Continent must face demand responses that can stem only from a persevering and concerted effort to implement *Ecclesia in Africa*, thereby restoring renewed strength and more firmly-grounded hope to this Continent in difficulty.

As a pledge of collegial communion and gratitude for your tireless availability and invaluable service, I impart my affectionate Blessing to you in your capacity as members of the Post-Synodal Council of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops for the Special Assembly for Africa.