



The Holy See

HOLY MASS FOR THE CONCLUSION
OF THE SECOND SPECIAL ASSEMBLY FOR AFRICA
OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS **HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI**

Vatican Basilica

Sunday, 25 October 2009

[Images of the celebration](#)

Venerable Brothers,

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Here is a message of hope for Africa: we have just listened to the Word of God. It is the message that the Lord of history never tires of renewing for the oppressed and overcome humanity of every era and every land, since the time he revealed to Moses his will for the Israelite slaves of Egypt: "I have witnessed the affliction of my people... and have heard their cry... so I know well what they are suffering. Therefore I have come down to rescue them... and lead them out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey" (Ex 3: 7-8). What is this land? Is it not the Kingdom of Reconciliation, Justice and Peace, to which all of humanity is called? God's plan does not change. It is the same as that prophesied by Jeremiah, in the magnificent oracles called "The Book of Consolation", from which today the First Reading is taken. It is an announcement of hope for the people of Israel, laid low by the invasion of the army of Nebuchadnezzar, by the devastation of Jerusalem and the Temple and the deportation to Babylonia. A message of joy for the "remainder" of Jacob's sons, which announces a future for them, because the Lord will lead them back to their lands, by a straight and easy road. The persons needing support, like the blind or the crippled, the pregnant woman and the woman in labor, will all experience the strength and tenderness of the Lord: he is a father for Israel, ready to care for it as if it were his firstborn (cf. Jer 31: 7-9).

God's plan does not change. Through the centuries and turns of history, he always aims at the same finality: the Kingdom of liberty and peace for all. And this implies his predilection for those

deprived of freedom and peace, for those violated in their dignity as human beings. We think in particular of our brothers and sisters who in Africa suffer poverty, diseases, injustice, wars and violence, forced migration. These favorite children of the heavenly Father are like the blind man in the Gospel, Bartimaeus (Mk 10: 46) at the gates of Jericho. Jesus the Nazarene passed that way. It is the road that leads to Jerusalem, where the Paschal Event will take place, his sacrificial Easter, towards which the Messiah goes for us. It is the road of his exodus which is also ours: the only way that leads to the land of reconciliation, justice and peace. On that road, the Lord meets Bartimaeus, who has lost his sight. Their paths cross, they become a single path. The blind man calls out, full of faith "Jesus, son of David, have pity on me!". Jesus replies: "Call him!", and adds: "What do you want me to do for you?". God is light and the Creator of light. Man is the son of light, made to see the light, but has lost his sight, and is forced to beg. The Lord, who became a beggar for us, walks next to him: thirsting for our faith and our love. "What do you want me to do for you?". God knows the answer, but asks; he wants the man to speak. He wants the man to stand up, to find the courage to ask for what is needed for his dignity. The Father wants to hear in the son's own voice the free choice to see the light once again, the light, the reason for Creation. "Master, I want to see!" And Jesus says to him: "Go your way; your faith has saved you". Immediately he received his sight and followed him on the way" (Mk 10: 51-52).

Dear Brothers, we give thanks because this "mysterious encounter between our poverty and the greatness" of God was achieved also in the [Synodal Assembly for Africa](#) that has ended today. God renewed his call: "Take courage! Get up..." (Mk 10: 49). And the Church in Africa, through its Pastors, having come from all the countries in the continent, from Madagascar and the other islands, has embraced the message of hope and light to walk on the path that leads to the Kingdom of God. "Go your way; your faith has saved you" (Mk 10: 52). Yes, faith in Jesus Christ when properly understood and experienced guides men and peoples to liberty in truth, or, to use the three words of the Synodal theme, to reconciliation, to justice and to peace. Bartimaeus who, healed, follows Jesus along the road, is the image of that humanity that, illuminated by faith, walks on the path towards the promised land. Bartimaeus becomes in turn a witness of the light, telling and demonstrating in the first person about being healed, renewed, regenerated. This is the Church in the world: a community of reconciled persons, operators of justice and peace; "salt and light" amongst the society of men and nations. Therefore the Synod strongly confirmed and manifested this that the Church is the Family of God, in which there can be no divisions based on ethnic, language or cultural groups. Moving witnesses showed us that, even in the darkest moments of human history, the Holy Spirit is at work and transforming the hearts of the victims and the persecutors, that they may know each other as brothers. The reconciled Church is the potent leaven of reconciliation in each country and in the whole African continent.

The Second Reading offers another perspective: the Church, the community that follows Christ on the path of love, has a sacerdotal form. The category of priesthood, as the interpretive key of the Mystery of Christ and, consequently, of the Church, was introduced in the New Testament, by the author of the Letter to the Hebrews. His intuition originates from Psalm 110, quoted in today's

words, where the Lord God assures the Messiah with a solemn promise: "You are a priest for ever of the order of Melchizedek" (Ps 110: 4). A reference which leads to another, taken from Psalm 2, in which the Messiah announces the Lord's decree which says about him: "You are my son, today have I fathered you" (Ps 2: 7). From these texts derives the attribution to Jesus Christ of a sacerdotal character, not in the generic sense, rather "of the order of Melchizedek", in other words the supreme and eternal priesthood, of divine not human origins. If each supreme priest "is taken from among men and made their representative before God" (Heb 5: 1), He alone, Christ, the Son of God, possesses a ministry that can be identified to his own person, a singular and transcendent ministry, on which universal salvation relies. Christ transmitted this ministry of his to the Church through the Holy Spirit; therefore the Church has in itself, in each of its members, because of Baptism, a sacerdotal characteristic. However here is a decisive aspect the priesthood of Jesus Christ is no longer primarily ritual, rather it is existential. The dimension of the rite is not abolished, but, as clearly seen in the institution of the Eucharist, takes its meaning from the Paschal Mystery, which completes the ancient sacrifices and surpasses them. Thus contemporarily a new sacrifice, a new ministry and a new temple are born, and all three coincide with the Mystery of Jesus Christ. United to him through the Sacraments, the Church prolongs its saving action, allowing man to be healed, like the blindman Bartimaeus. Thus the ecclesial community, in the steps of its Master and Lord, is called to walk decisively along the path of service, to share the condition of men and women in its time, to witness to all the love of God and thus sow hope.

Dear friends, this message of salvation is always transmitted by the Church by joining evangelization and the promotion of humanity. Let us take the example of the historical Encyclical *Popolorum Progressio*: what the Servant of God Paul VI elaborated in terms of reflection, the missionaries created and continue to create in the field, promoting a development that respects local cultures and the environment, following a logic that now, more than 40 years later, appears to be the only one capable of allowing the African people to emerge from the slavery of hunger and sickness. This means transmitting the announcement of hope, following a "sacerdotal form", that is, living the Gospel in the first person, trying to translate it into projects and undertakings that are consistent with its principle dynamic foundation, which is love. In these three weeks, the Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops has confirmed what my venerable Predecessor John Paul II had already clearly focused on, and that I also wanted to look at more closely in the recent Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*: what is necessary, therefore, is the renewal of the model of global development, in such a way that it be capable of "including within its range all peoples and not just the better off" (n. 39). What the social doctrine of the Church has always maintained is what is required today of globalization (cf. *ibid.*). This we must remember should not be understood fatalistically as though its dynamics were produced by anonymous impersonal forces or structures independent of the human will. Globalization is a human reality and as such can be modified in line with one or another cultural impositions. The Church works with its personalist and community concept to steer the globalization of humanity in relational terms, in terms of communion and the sharing of goods (cf. *ibid.* n. 42).

"Take courage! Get up"... This is how the Lord of life and hope addresses the Church and peoples of Africa at the end of these weeks of Synodal reflection. Get up, Church in Africa, Family of God, because you are being called by the Heavenly Father whom your ancestors invoked as Creator, before knowing his merciful closeness, revealed in his only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ. Set out on the path of a new evangelization with the courage that comes from the Holy Spirit. The urgent action of evangelization which has been spoken about so much in these days also involves an urgent appeal for reconciliation, an indispensable condition for instilling in Africa justice among men and building a fair and lasting peace that respects each individual and people; a peace that requires and is open to the contribution of all people of good will irrespective of their religious, ethnic, linguistic, cultural and social backgrounds. In such a challenging mission, pilgrim Church in Africa of the third millennium, you are not alone. The whole Catholic Church is near to you with its prayer and active solidarity, and from heaven you are accompanied by the African saints who, with their lives to the point of martyrdom sometimes, testified to the fullness of their faith in Christ.

Courage! Get up, African continent, land that welcomed the Savior of the World when as a child he had to take refuge with Joseph and Mary in Egypt to save his life from the persecution of King Herod. Welcome with renewed enthusiasm the Gospel proclamation so that the Face of Christ may light with its splendor the multiplicity of cultures and languages of your peoples. As it offers the bread of the Word and the Eucharist, the Church also undertakes to operate, with every means at its disposal, to ensure that no African should be deprived of his or her daily bread. For this reason, along with the work of primary importance of evangelization, Christians are actively involved in interventions in favor of promoting humanity.

Dear Synodal Fathers, at the end of these reflections of mine, I want to salute you most warmly, and thank you for your edifying participation. Return home, you, pastors of the Church in Africa, take my blessing to your communities. Transmit to everyone the oft-heard appeal of this [Synod](#) for reconciliation, justice and peace. As the Synodal Assembly draws to a close, I have to renew my most vivid thanks to the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops and all their collaborators. I express my grateful thoughts to the choirs of the Nigerian community in Rome and the Ethiopian College who are contributing to the celebration of this liturgy. And finally I would like to thank everyone who has accompanied the Synodal work with their prayer. May the Virgin Mary recompense each and every one of them, and allow the Church in Africa to grow in every part of that great continent, spreading the "salt" and "light" of the Gospel everywhere.

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