



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE BISHOPS OF ETHIOPIA AND ERITREA
ON THEIR « AD LIMINA » VISIT**

*Pontifical Ethiopian College (Vatican City)
Monday, 17 October 2005*

Dear Brother Bishops,

With joy I greet you, the Bishops of Ethiopia and Eritrea, on your visit *ad limina Apostolorum* and I thank you for the gracious words addressed to me on your behalf by Archbishop Berhaneyesus Souraphiel, President of your Episcopal Conference. It is particularly appropriate that this meeting should take place here in the Pontifical Ethiopian College, as you celebrate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the opening of the present building. The location of the College here inside Vatican City is an eloquent sign of the close bonds of communion linking the Church in your countries with the See of Rome. You are heirs to an ancient and venerable tradition of Christian witness, the seeds of which were sown when the minister of the Ethiopian Queen asked to be baptized (cf. *Acts 8:36*). In recent centuries, the peoples of the Horn of Africa have welcomed European missionaries, whose work has strengthened the ties between the See of Peter and the local Church. I rejoice to see that today, Catholics in your territories continue to proclaim with one voice the apostolic faith that has been handed down, “so that the world may believe” (*Jn 17:21*).

Indeed, the united witness that you give, transcending all political and ethnic divisions, has a vital role to play in bringing healing and reconciliation to the troubled region in which you live. When there is genuine commitment to following Christ, “the way, the truth and the life” (*Jn 14:6*), difficulties and misunderstandings of whatever kind can be overcome, because in him God has reconciled the world to himself (cf. *2 Cor 5:19*) and in him all people can find the answer to their deepest aspirations. I encourage you in particular to express solidarity in whatever way you can with your suffering brothers and sisters in Somalia, where political instability makes it almost impossible to live with the dignity that belongs properly to every human person. As authentic

teachers of the faith, help your people to understand that there can be no peace without justice and no justice without forgiveness (cf. *Message for the 2002 World Day of Peace*). In this way you will be true sons of your Father in heaven (cf. *Mt 5:45*).

In your countries, where Catholics are such a small minority, the work of ecumenical dialogue takes on particular urgency, and I am glad that your Episcopal Conference has been addressing this challenge. Whatever obstacles you may encounter, do not be deterred from carrying forward this vital task. Among Christians, genuine fraternity is no mere sentiment, nor does it imply indifference to the truth. It is rooted in the sacrament of Baptism which makes us members of the Body of Christ (cf. *1 Cor 12:13; Eph 4:4-6*). Since ecumenical progress also depends upon good theological formation, it should be greatly assisted by the establishment of a Catholic University in Ethiopia, and I give thanks to God that the long negotiations over this project have recently borne fruit. Practical ecumenism in the form of joint humanitarian endeavours will also serve to deepen the bonds of communion as you reach out with Christ-like compassion towards the sick, the hungry, refugees, displaced persons and victims of war.

As you know, I recently had the joy of celebrating *World Youth Day* with a multitude of young people from all over the world. In your countries, where around half the population is under twenty years of age, you too have numerous opportunities to harness the vitality and enthusiasm of the new generation. With their ideals, their energy and their desire to engage deeply with all that is good and true, young people need to be helped to discover that friendship with Christ offers them everything they are seeking (cf. *Homily for the Inauguration of the Pontificate*, 24 April 2005). Encourage them to set out on the adventure of discipleship, and help them to recognize and respond generously if God is calling them to serve him in the priesthood and the religious life. In paying tribute to the work of generations of missionaries - including some of you here present - I pray at the same time that the seeds which have been planted will continue to bear fruit in a rich harvest of indigenous vocations.

Your visit to Rome takes place in the closing days of this *Year of the Eucharist*. As I conclude my remarks today, I urge you to deepen your personal devotion to this great mystery, by which Christ gives himself totally to us so as to nourish us and to transform us into his likeness. Your people have experienced famine, oppression and warfare. Help them to discover in the Eucharist the central act of transformation that alone can truly renew the world, changing violence into love, slavery into freedom, death into life (cf. *Homily at World Youth Day*, 21 August 2005). I entrust you and your priests, deacons, religious and lay faithful to the intercession of Mary, Woman of the Eucharist, and I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of grace and strength in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

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