



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE BISHOPS FROM AFRICA ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT

Monday, 5 October 1981

Dear Brothers in our Lord Jesus Christ,

1. You have formed yourselves into a united interterritorial Episcopal Conference – that of The Gambia, Liberia and Sierra Leone, and as such you have assembled here today. Through this union among yourselves you find fraternal support, face common problems, and seek effective means to preach the Gospel of Christ. Over and above all this, on occasions like the present one, you are in a position to live the mystery of the Church's unity as fully as possible among yourselves: *Ecce quam bonum et quam iucundum habitare fratres in unum*[1].

2. These same advantages apply also in a different way to your *ad Limina* visit. Here you and your local ecclesial communities find the support of the universal Church. Here you are assured of the personal *interest and concern of the Bishop of Rome*, who testifies before you to the love that the whole Church has for you. Here the Holy See endeavours to share with you the burdens of your office and your common problems; here you seek and receive among brothers the solidarity and support needed for fulfilling your mission of proclaiming Christ. In this regard, the Sacred Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples, and all those throughout the world who are associated with it in collaborating for the missions, assure you of their prayers, their esteem and their desire to assist you.

3. As Bishops, you have come to Rome to invoke the holy Apostles Peter and Paul, and to find strength at their tombs. With them it is fitting *to turn immediately to Jesus*. With Peter you confess to Jesus and before the world "You are the Christ, the Son of the living"[2]. And with Paul you reiterate your deep conviction that Jesus is for all of us "our wisdom, our righteousness, our sanctification and redemption"[3].

This conviction about Christ explains your whole ministry and all your efforts to bring his name before your people. It explains your desire to preach his Gospel of salvation. Your faith in the Son of God sustains you in the toil involved in gathering your people together by word and sacrament into one ecclesial family, one communion. Because you

yourselves have accepted the mystery hidden for centuries and revealed in Christ, you are spurred on to communicate Christ to others, proclaiming the content of his revelation as the great original contribution of Christianity.

4. Because Jesus is our redemption and our all, your ministry is placed *under the sign of hope*. You hope in God's word; you trust in his promises. You rely on his help each day, just as your missionary predecessors did before you. Your sentiments are indeed identical with those of the Apostle Paul: "For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God"[4]. With this apostolic hope, dear Brothers, go forward zealously in your pastoral labours. Proclaim incessantly *the mystery of Christ and his Church*, in accordance with the lofty teaching of the Second Vatican Council, and in fidelity to all of its directives.

Continue in your ministry of forming Christ in the young generation and of offering to them the full challenge of his Sermon on the Mount. God will certainly reward you and all who have worked with you in promoting *Catholic schools* and the many services that these schools render to the Catholic community and to society in general.

Do not cease to present Christ's teaching on *justice and fraternal love* to all men and women of good will at every level of society. By so doing you will promote the harmony and well-being of the nations themselves of which you are a part.

5. In a very special way continue to exercise your pastoral zeal in *fostering religious and priestly vocations* for Christ. "Cast all your anxieties on him"[5], and pray "the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest"[6]. Appeal to your people to understand how vitally necessary this is for the community, and how important is the contribution of the Christian family in fostering ecclesiastical vocations. Appeal to the people for the prayer and sacrifice that God requires of the community so that young people may receive the grace to persevere with pure and generous love in following Christ. Appeal especially to the sick and to the infirm to offer up their sufferings, in union with those of the Saviour, for this holy intention.

6. Through a concerted pastoral effort, you now have an inter-territorial seminary within the Vicariate Apostolic of Monrovia. This common apostolic initiative deserves your sustained interest and the full measure of your personal attention – your individual and collective attention. *The seminary is of capital importance* for the life of the Christian community and for the future of God's people. In the seminary, God's word must be authentically lived and faithfully transmitted in its integrity, in obedience to the command of Christ and for the well-being of every future generation of your people. Fidelity in transmitting the faith and diligence in training seminarians are *pastoral activities of supreme importance for Bishops*: they are expressions of deep pastoral love. Yes, it was with profound insight that the Second Vatican Council referred to the seminary as "the heart of the diocese"[7].

7. Dearly beloved Brothers, on this *ad Limina* visit, with all your heart, *renew your confidence in Jesus Christ and in his Holy Spirit*. In the power of the Holy Spirit, God's word has been sown, has grown, and has already yielded a rich harvest for the Kingdom of God. Amid trials and difficulties the Holy Spirit has sustained your predecessors, yourselves and your clergy. He will continue to be with you and in you, and to work through you. I would now ask you to take back my Apostolic Blessing to all your people. In particular I ask that you convey to your priests, religious and other collaborators in the Gospel the message of Christian hope that we have celebrated together in Rome: "For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God"[8].

And until the Lord comes in glory, may Mary, faithful Spouse of the Holy Spirit, be for the pilgrim people of God in your beloved lands “a sign of sure hope and solace”^[9]. May the Mother of Jesus be close to you all with her maternal love.

[1] *Ps. 132 (133)*, 1.

[2] *Matth.* 16, 16.

[3] *1 Cor.* 1, 30.

[4] *1 Tim.* 4, 10.

[5] *1 Petr.* 5, 7.

[6] *Matth.* 9, 37.

[7] *Optatam Totius*, 5.

[8] *1 Tim.* 4, 10.

[9] *Lumen Gentium*, 68

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