



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC PILGRIMAGE TO NIGERIA, BENIN

GABON AND EQUATORIAL GUINEA

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE YOUNG PEOPLE OF NIGERIA

Onitsha (Nigeria)

Saturday, 13 February 1982

Dear young men and women of Nigeria,

This afternoon the Pope belongs to you!

I am truly overjoyed to see you here in your teeming thousands from all parts of your vast country.

You have displayed for me your youthful agility, your fascinating acrobatics, your joy and your optimism. I am very grateful to you; I am very happy to be with you. Long before we met, you were in my thoughts and prayers. And now the time has come for a personal encounter. Permit me to share some thoughts with you.

1. Youth is the age of hope, of promise, of enthusiasm, of plans and of ideals. Youth does not want to give up in the face of difficulties. Youth does not want to put up with the shortcomings of the status quo. Youth believes in a better world and is determined to do something to help bring it about.

You must be known for your generosity and openness to others. You must be grateful to your parents. You will love them, respect them, help them, and obey them. You will accept your teachers, respect them and follow their instructions. You will be known for self-sacrifice, diligence at your studies or work, and efficiency in your assigned duties. You will sacrifice yourselves in Catholic lay apostolate organizations in order to bear witness to Christ. You must be a dedicated laity zealously pursuing your mission to communicate Christ. Some of you will be called to become priests, brothers or sisters, with a special role of service in the Kingdom of God.

2. My beloved young people of Nigeria, you must be outstanding for discipline, strength of character and reliability. This

will show itself in several ways. You will be chaste. You will resist all temptations which attack the sanctity of your body. You will bring your chastity to the priesthood, religious life or marriage. You will have many opportunities to express discipline through Christian temperance. The attractions and pressures of the world often lure young people into self-indulgence or escapism. Temptations to the excesses of drink and to drug abuse are all around you.

Will-power reinforced by humble prayer is essential to anyone who is trying to act in a fully human way.

3. It is a major decision for you to choose a permanent state of life. For most of you it will be marriage. But for many of you it may be the priesthood, the brotherhood or the sisterhood. You will need the advice of your priests, your parents and your teachers. You will need God's guidance. Pray. Rely on Christ. Open your hearts to him. Open your hearts wide to Christ. Do not be afraid. Be generous. The one who gives sparingly will reap sparingly. The one who gives with generosity will reap an abundant harvest. You can count on God's grace.

4. A good Christian is a good citizen. You must love your country, obey its laws, respect your leaders, and pay your taxes. You are called to take your due part in political, social, economic and cultural affairs. When you are eligible, you should vote and be voted for in political elections.

I wish to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the national programme of youth service. I commend the young men and women who generously give of themselves for this period of service outside their state of origin, forging new bonds of friendship and strengthening fraternal solidarity and national unity. At the same time I am grateful for the consideration given to priests and religious, whose assignments must not conflict with their priestly and religious status.

5. As young people, you should constantly strive to identify the ills of your society, such as bribery and corruption, the embezzlement of government or company funds, extravagant and unproductive spending, the parade of wealth, neglect of the poor and the friendless, nepotism, tribalism, political antagonism, denial of the rights of the poor, abortion, contraception and other evils which also ravage other countries. As true youth you will see, judge and then act according to the criteria of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

6. In all things, you will radiate joy, peace, brotherliness, optimism and the hope of a better Nigeria. This is your contribution as Christians; this is what you learn from the Lord. This is the challenge of his word, which must take root in your lives and bear fruit. Remember how Jesus challenges you over and over again in the Gospels: "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God..." .

I wish to show my appreciation of the many forms of organized Catholic youth apostolate at the various levels (national, diocesan, parish and station). I praise the many associations through which you fulfil your commitment to the lay apostolate and reaffirm your desire to serve humanity in the name of Christ. I pay tribute to your priest chaplains who help you so much, and also to the religious brothers and sisters and to the laypeople who help to make your organizations a vital expression of the life of the Church.

7. Young people of Nigeria, I have come to encourage you in the great mission you have to help build a better world, to

advance Christ's Kingdom of truth and life, of holiness and grace, of justice, love and peace. It is to him that I wish to direct your gaze. As was said to the early Christians: "Let us not lose sight of Jesus, who leads us in our faith and brings it to perfection". In his name – in the holy name of Jesus, the Saviour of the world, the Redeemer of man, the friend of youth – I want to express to you those sentiments that I have shared with young men and women throughout the world: Young people of Nigeria, you have an incomparable dignity as children of God, as brothers and sisters of Christ.

Young people of Nigeria, Christ died for you, to redeem you. Christ loves you and I love you too!

Young people of Nigeria, "let us love one another, since love comes from God".

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