



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO TOGO, IVORY COAST, CAMEROON,
CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC, ZAIRE, KENYA AND MOROCCO

WELCOME CEREMONY

ADDRESS OF POPE JOHN PAUL II

Jomo Kenyatta International Airport - Nairobi (Kenya)

Friday, 16 August 1985

*Mr President,
Distinguished Members of the Government,
Your Eminence Cardinal Otunga and my Brother Bishops,
Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,
Dear People of Kenya,*

1. I am happy to set foot again on your beloved land. The enthusiastic welcome which you gave me five years ago remains fresh in my mind and heart. And now I have the pleasure once more of experiencing your warm hospitality, of walking in your midst as a brother and friend, of looking with joy upon the smiling faces of your children, the strong and eager faces of the young people, the welcoming faces of *the whole family of Kenya*.

I thank His Excellency the President for his kind welcome. It is a confirmation of the mutual respect and esteem which have always characterized our relations, and for which I am deeply grateful. I offer cordial greetings to all the citizens of this country: to the elders and local leaders, to the young people, to the sick and suffering, and in a special way to *the families, the backbone of your society*. I want my words to convey the deep sentiments of love and brotherhood which fill my heart for each of you.

2. It is indeed a joy to be in Kenya again, this time with the main purpose of taking part in the

Forty-third International Eucharistic Congress. As you know, this is the first time that a Eucharistic Congress has ever been held in the heart of the African continent. It has been made possible by the openness and hospitality of all the Kenyan people and their leaders, as well as by the generous co-operation of the local Bishops and faithful. At the same time, it is a sign of a *new stage of maturity and vigour* in the life of the young and thriving Church in Africa. The prayers and sacrifices of the many missionaries who came here and the open hearts that received the Gospel message are now bringing forth a rich and plentiful harvest. The Church in Africa is entering a new era, an era in which she will be called increasingly to reach out generously beyond her national and continental frontiers and to place her resources and gifts at the service of the universal Church. What you have received as a gift you now wish to give as a gift. The Church in every land rejoices with you at this new stage of dynamic life and mission. A living confirmation of this new era can be seen in the Catholic Higher Institute of Eastern Africa which I shall formally inaugurate here in Nairobi during the course of these days.

3. The Eucharistic Congress, which has brought pilgrims to Nairobi from many parts of the world, focuses our attention on two of the central realities of the Christian community: *the Eucharistic and the Family*.

In the Eucharist, we commemorate the most important events in the life of Jesus Christ: the Last Supper with the Apostles, his Passion and Death on the Cross, his Resurrection and Ascension into glory, his continuing presence in the Church through the power of the Holy Spirit. In the Eucharist, under the appearances of bread and wine, we Christians have communion with him whom we profess to be the Saviour and Redeemer of all humanity.

The Eucharistic Congress also invites us to reflect on that fundamental element of society and the Church which is *the family*, the life-long, loving communion of husband and wife and the children who are the fruit of this union. Without healthy family life there can be no stable life in any country, nor vigorous life in the Church.

The Christian family is like the Church-in-miniature. United in Christ through Baptism and the Eucharist, the family is the first school of prayer, faith and the most basic values of human life. And the Sacrament of Marriage is so closely related to the life of the Church that the love of husband and wife is a symbol of the very love of Christ for the Church. For me, as the Successor of Peter and Chief Shepherd of the Catholic Church, it is a great joy to come to Kenya for the Forty-third International Eucharistic Congress. For months we have been praying for its success. I am now pleased to be here in Nairobi, to join in this great ecclesial event with my brothers and sisters in Christ, with the Church in Kenya and all Africa, with pilgrims from every continent.

4. I am pleased, too, that this visit will enable me to meet *many fellow Christians and members of other religions*, with whom we share a common dignity as children of the same God and Father in heaven. I look forward as well to visiting the Centre for the United Nations Environment

Programme, and to meeting in the people associated with the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements. In an age when advanced means of travel and communication are making our world ever smaller, we are witnessing a growing need for *dialogue and cooperation* between individuals and nations. The Church wishes always to offer support to initiatives which seek to meet this need. The Church encourages all efforts to promote unity, brotherhood and peace.

I again express my thanks to all who have come to welcome me today. It is very good to be with you. I pray that the Lord will bless each of you abundantly, and that the words of the prophet Isaiah will be a true description of your families: "My people will live in a peaceful home, in safe houses, in quiet dwellings" (*Is.* 32, 18). Peace be to all Kenya!

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