



The Holy See

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

Saturday, 20 March 1999

Your Eminence,

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,

1. With great joy I welcome to this house you who have received from the Lord the office of shepherding his Church in Mozambique. You have come to Rome to visit the tombs of the Apostles and to meet the Successor of Peter, hoping for new light and support in your ministry of building up the Body of Christ (cf. Eph 4:12), in communion with the universal Church. I thank Bishop Francisco Silota, President of your Episcopal Conference, for his kind words relating the spiritual vigour and missionary dynamism of your communities and their fidelity to the Gospel. A sign of this dynamism and ecclesial growth is the new Diocese of Gurué, created in 1993 and entrusted to Bishop Manuel Chuanguira Machado, to whom I extend a special greeting on his first visit; the same reason prompts me also to mention the new Bishop of Pemba, Bishop Tomé Makhweliha, and the Auxiliary of Maputo, Bishop Adriano Langa. To you all I extend my affectionate greetings in Christ, my deep appreciation of your ecclesial service and the assurance of my prayers so that, filled with apostolic zeal, you may continue to proclaim the Gospel to the people entrusted to you.

2. You have wished to include this visit ad limina Apostolorum among various official acts commemorating the jubilee of the evangelization of Mozambique, which leads me to begin this conversation with you by speaking of the Eucharist, since it is the "centre and culmination of the whole life of the Christian community" (*Christus Dominus*, n. 30) and the sacred portal through which Jesus Christ entered your land.

In fact, he made himself present with these words: "*This is my body. This is the cup of my blood.... It will be shed for you and for all so that sins may be forgiven*". The first Mass in Mozambique was celebrated by the chaplain of Vasco da Gama's Portuguese fleet on 11 March 1498. Five hundred years later, the same act of consecration was made *in persona Christi* by us here, this morning,

and - how could we forget it? - by almost all the priests in Mozambique, who have been sent with us "to feed the Church of the Lord which he obtained with his own blood" (Acts 20:28).

Moved by this thought, through each of you and through your priests I would like to express all the hope, concern and esteem that I cherish for the Church you shepherd. I kneel at the foot of the one altar of the Cross prepared as a table for all your communities, from the one at the cathedral to the smallest and the most remote to which the Eucharist is taken, in communion with the one divine Victim who willingly gave himself up to death for all Mozambicans and for all humanity, and in the one and eternal Priesthood in which, by grace and by grace alone, we priests share. I, servant of the servants of God, making the most spiritually of the moment in the Eucharistic Prayer when you say my name and ecclesial service, draw close to every celebrant and with an affectionate embrace say to him: "Thank you for having given sacramental birth to Jesus in Mozambique. Now that he is born in your hands when you called to him "my Body" and "my Blood", do not forget any of the sons and daughters who, for him and in him, you have begotten for our God and Father! Do not deny in any way and for any reason what you have freely chosen to be and are: "body given up" and "blood shed ... for the forgiveness of sins". I ask you to bring the Pope's embrace of peace and his Blessing to every one of the ecclesial communities which you shepherd in the love of Christ".

3. Your reports say that because of the great abundance of Christians, free at last to profess their faith and adherence to Christ now that their roads are open and safer thanks to the return of peace, in many places the Eucharist has to be celebrated in the open air because the places of worship cannot accommodate the large crowds. You increase the number of celebrations, but the phenomenon continues ... it is symptomatic! Mozambique was visited by the Eucharist when its people were still ignorant of the welcome Guest who was to come; now that they know him to be the "true bread ... which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world" (Jn 6:32-33), they flock to him.

It could be said that God made Mozambique Eucharistic; I see its faithful people offering themselves to God to be Eucharist. God has blessed them with a special responsiveness and attraction to the Blessed Sacrament, as if only this bread could satisfy them. *May no community be deprived of the regular celebration of Sunday Mass* and the other sacraments! In this way, they will not run the risk of drinking from other sources with turbid water or of confusing the voice of the true Shepherd with that of some stranger who might want to enter the fold without passing through the door which is Christ (cf. Jn 10:1-9). The situation of Christianity in the world teaches us that communities which are regularly nourished with the bread of the Word and the Eucharist are less vulnerable to the influence of the sects. This is why I would like to make this appeal to each of the priests in Mozambique: Do you see any possibility of bringing the Sunday comfort of the Eucharist to one more community? I say this to you and to others. May the diocesan presbyterate, in which missionary and religious priests should also feel welcome, obey to the letter the command given by the divine Teacher when, concerned that the multitudes following him would faint on the way if

they returned home without eating, he said to his disciples: "They need not go away: you give them something to eat" (Mt 14:16; cf. Mk 8:3).

In this service and in so many others which are found in the small Christian communities, I know that an immense number of *catechists and lay leaders* work with you, each in his own way and at his own level. I would like to salute, thank and encourage them on this occasion: their names are written in heaven. Dear Bishops and priests, may you be attentive guides for them and a continual support, especially if, in your absence, they have to preside at the Sunday assembly. May it be clear to everyone, however, that these assemblies must take place "in expectation of a priest" (*Directory for Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*, n. 26), and that they are an opportunity to ask the Lord to send more labourers into his harvest (cf. Mt 9:38).

4. In fact, the Christian community's life is fully assured only when there are priests, because it is they who administer the sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist, enabling the flock to drink at the springs of eternal life. I thank God that ordinations are being celebrated in your Dioceses. But how many more you need!

Some of you, however, regret that you cannot accept all the requests of the young men who want to enter the seminaries, because they are too full. What a pity! In my country, circumstances very different from yours led to the closing of the seminary in Kraków, but my Archbishop, Adam Sapięha, secretly reorganized it in his residence; he accepted me and I spent my first two years as a seminarian with him. I am not telling you to do the same, but what I mean is that God should inspire you with the ways and means for accepting the vocations he sends you, which you need so much.

The closeness of my Bishop, especially during the years when I was living in his residence, had a great influence on my formation for the priesthood. Seminarians need to meet and to "be" with their Pastor; on the other hand, in the latter's pastoral responsibilities towards candidates for the priesthood, it is a great help if he makes a point of "visiting them often and in some way "being" with them" (*Pastores dabo vobis*, n. 65). The Pastor's closeness is necessary for his whole flock, as is stated in canon 395 of the *Code of Canon Law*, which requires his personal residence in the Diocese.

By his word and example, he helps young men to understand that the priesthood is a *configuration to Christ*, Bridegroom and Head of the Church, but also a Victim and humble Servant. A seminary and a presbyterate strengthened by prayer, mutual support and friendship foster the spirit of obedience that prepares the priest to fulfil the pastoral duties his Bishop has entrusted to him. The mystery of the Church as communion is reinforced when episcopal authority is exercised as an *amoris officium* (cf. Jn 13:14), and priestly obedience follows the example of service set by Christ (cf. Phil 2:7-8).

Moreover, neither the seminary nor the presbyterate should become a privileged life-style. Simplicity and self-denial must be the characteristics of those who follow the Lord, who "came not to be served, but to serve" (Mk 10:45). As the *Directory for the Ministry and Life of Priests* says: "A priest could hardly be a true servant and minister of his brothers if he were excessively worried with his comfort and well-being" (n. 67).

5. I would now like to express my deep appreciation of the inestimable service of *consecrated persons*: to all of them, men and women, I express the Church's deepest gratitude! They shine with the light of the Absolute and have been placed with eternal splendour like stars in the firmament to lead many on the paths of justice (cf. Dn 12:3). They have felt their hearts burning with a fire that is not of this earth and which makes them that "lamp" of the Gospel lit not to be "put under a bushel [in their own Diocese], but on a stand [to] give light to all in the house" (cf. Mt 5:15), God's house. Thus they have the legitimate aspiration to expand to the ends of the Church, in order to accompany "the Lamb wherever he goes" (Rv 14:4).

It is important that this witness shine brightly in Mozambique, which is why I cannot but rejoice at the great flourishing of religious vocations in your Dioceses, including the new local foundations. I know that the sisters offer splendid collaboration in the pastoral life of the Christian communities, filling many needs in ecclesial life or guiding them in the absence of a resident priest. But they can never be considered the female equivalent of a priest, since their vocation is not to shepherd the flock, but aims at keeping alive in it the ideal of the Beatitudes, anticipating the definitive state of God's kingdom by living the evangelical counsels. Therefore, with prudence and discernment (cf. 1 Thes 5:21), help your foundations to grow to be authentic religious families - if necessary by grouping together associations of different Dioceses whose members recognize they have the same vocation and charism - while seeing that their candidates are carefully chosen and receive a complete human, spiritual, theological and pastoral formation which will prepare them for their mission in the Church.

6. Your closest pastoral co-workers are *priests*, to which you are joined by bonds of apostolic brotherhood forged by the grace of Holy Orders. You can already count on the collaboration of a sufficient number of diocesan priests, while others are members of missionary and religious congregations or *Fidei donum* priests, and each, according to his respective degree of relationship, must feel part of "one priestly body and one family of which the Bishop is the father" (*Christus Dominus*, n. 28). Show interest in them all, whatever their age, condition or nationality, whether they are natives or come from abroad (cf. *ibid.*, n. 16).

If in a presbyterate part of the clergy comes from a different background, the Bishop should not "make distinctions" among priests (cf. Jas 2:4). Here I would like to mention the practical collaboration which the Holy See regularly asks of you: indicate the names of *possible candidates for the Episcopate* from among the priests of your Diocese. The names submitted must be the result of an impartial evaluation of the best possibilities offered by the clergy, without being

influenced by their origin: it is then the Holy See's task to choose the Pastor it deems best suited to the pastoral governance of a Diocese.

7. The Church's history shines with the example of missionaries who, in the footsteps of St Paul, became "all things to all men, that [they] might by all means save some" (cf. 1 Cor 9:22). One need only think of Fr Gonçalves da Silveira and the beginnings of evangelization in your land. Now, no Diocese, no Bishop who has welcomed a missionary to his own table and shared food with him, who has opened his heart to him, confiding his projects and difficulties to him in order later to shoulder together the burden of apostolic days, will be able to say of him: he is a "stranger"! But this ecclesial norm is almost 2,000 years old: "You are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" (Eph 2:19)! For the Church, this norm abolishes all the practices and customs, criteria and values of this world which are opposed to it or impede it.

We are *God's family*! The Synod Fathers, during the Special Assembly for your continent, recognized this notion as "an expression of the Church's nature particularly appropriate for Africa", and proposed "building up the Church as family, avoiding all ethnocentrism and excessive particularism, trying instead to encourage reconciliation and true communion between different ethnic groups, favouring solidarity and the sharing of personnel and resources among the particular Churches, without undue ethnic considerations" (*Ecclesia in Africa*, n. 63), in the certainty that "the union of the family of man is greatly consolidated and perfected by the unity ... established among the sons of God" (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 42).

8. The Synod's decision to give priority to presenting the Church as a family is based on the observation that "in Africa, in particular, the family is the foundation on which the social edifice is built" (*Ecclesia in Africa*, n. 80). And so it must continue to be. Therefore, any effort or pastoral concern of the Church can never be enough when it is a matter of saving a *family*. In fact, when a family breaks up, a rupture occurs in society's future, through which its vigour slips away. Therefore help Mozambican society - particularly those who plan and guide it with laws and public institutions - to deliberate and to organize itself by taking the family as its yardstick and standard. Tomorrow's Mozambique will be the family it has today, since it is the cradle and first school of its citizens.

Begun in the family, human formation continues at school. Unfortunately, the long war and its consequences have caused immense damage to the national educational network, leaving the nation unable to satisfy the greatest aspiration of its *youth*: to learn and to be trained. Listening daily to the complaints of parents and children, the Church - exercising her legitimate right to be active in the world of education - has invested as much as she can in this area, over and above her means. I would like to praise the admirable work of so many Christian teachers who have committed their best energies and all their knowledge to it, from elementary school to the Catholic University of Mozambique.

Catholic schools offer, regardless of social status or religion, a sound human, cultural and religious education, with respect for the students' conscience and family choices. In it, young people of different backgrounds can learn the *dialogue of life*, in order to participate in building a society that accepts each individual and respects their differences. Unity among all the citizens, without distinction of origin or creed, based on love for their common homeland, must be pursued zealously in order to work together for the integral development of the nation in harmony and justice. May the young people not be afraid to involve themselves in their country's future!

9. Dear Brothers, many times and for different reasons you have mentioned the difficulties stemming from your peoples' ancestral customs and morals which prevent them from adhering completely to the demands of the Gospel, while immediately affirming how readily they accept it. I know that this contradiction is only apparent, because the level of adherence in question varies; but does this apparent contradiction not conceal the true and greatest challenge of every age: - *even today: the urgent need to evangelize?*

These 500 years of evangelization among your peoples have more than once seen the miracle of a Church rising from the ashes with extraordinary power. Today, when the Church in Mozambique already has sound foundations, the time has come to produce a great wave of missionaries who will turn to your land where there are still millions who have not been evangelized, "to proclaim the Good News to all, and to lead those who hear it to Baptism and the Christian life". If you commit yourselves and "make a vigorous and unhesitating commitment to this path, the Cross can be planted in every part of the continent for the salvation of peoples not afraid to open their doors to the Redeemer" (*Ecclesia in Africa*, n. 74).

10. Venerable Cardinal, beloved Brothers in the Episcopate, at the end of our meeting I would again like to express my gratitude for your visit and for bringing the generous fruits of a sowing of the Gospel which is 500 hundred years old in your land. I implore God's goodwill on the whole nation, asking him to free the hearts of all Mozambique's inhabitants from resentment, bitterness and vengeance, to come to the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 truly and deeply reconciled and at peace with God and men.

This reconciliation - and Christians know it - has its source of grace and dynamism in the Eucharist, and "the Year 2000 will be intensely Eucharistic", since "in the sacrament of the Eucharist the Saviour, who took flesh in Mary's womb 20 centuries ago, continues to offer himself to humanity as the source of divine life" (*Tertio millennio adveniente*, n. 55). May Mary, Mother of the Redeemer, help you lead the People of God in Mozambique to this saving encounter. With my Apostolic Blessing.

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