



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE BISHOPS OF CÔTE D'IVOIRE
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Monday 3 April 2006

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

I welcome you with joy in these days when you are making your visit *ad limina Apostolorum*, thus expressing your indestructible bond with the Successor of Peter and with the universal Church. Indeed, the Bishop, who "is the visible principle and foundation of unity in his own particular Church, is also the visible bond of ecclesiastical communion between his particular Church and the universal Church" (*Pastores Gregis*, n. 55).

I thank the President of your Bishops' Conference, Bishop Laurent Akran Mandjo, for the kind words he has addressed to me on your behalf, sketching a vast panorama of the Church's situation in Côte d'Ivoire.

On your return, please convey to everyone the warm greetings of the Pope and the assurance of his fervent prayers that the Nation will recover unity and peace in authentic brotherhood among all its children.

Indeed, the crisis your Country is living through has unfortunately brought to light the divisions that are a deep wound in relations between the different members of society. The resulting violence has seriously undermined trust between people and the stability of the Country, leaving in its wake great suffering which it is difficult to heal.

The re-establishment of true peace will only be possible through forgiveness, generously granted, and through effectively achieved reconciliation between the individuals and groups concerned. To succeed in this, all parties involved must agree to pursue dialogue courageously, to examine thoroughly and loyally the causes that have led to the present situation and to find the means to

reach a solution in justice and in truth acceptable to all.

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate, Catholics play their part in this joint effort, for the construction of a reconciled world can never be foreign to them. It is their responsibility to help establish harmonious and brotherly relations between people and between communities.

If the full realization of this goal is to be credible, trust must first be re-created among the disciples of Christ, despite their possible differences of opinion. For authentic love must first be lived within the Church, in unity and reconciliation, thus following the Lord's teaching: "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13: 35).

It is thus up to Christians to allow the power of the Holy Spirit to transform them so that they may be true witnesses of the love of the Father, who wants to make all men and women into one family. This commitment, which brings them into contact with the sufferings and needs of their brothers and sisters, will be a convincing expression of God's love.

In your diocesan Churches, in response to political or ethnic tension, Bishops, priests and consecrated persons must be models of brotherhood and love for everyone. Furthermore, they must contribute, with their words and behaviour, to the edification of a united and reconciled society.

In this perspective, the initial and continuing formation of priests must always be one of your priority concerns. To deal with the difficult situations in the contemporary world and especially to enable priests to fulfil their priesthood, this formation will place an essential importance on spiritual life.

Indeed, the priest's role is to help the faithful discover God's mystery and be open to others. For this reason, he is called to be a genuine seeker of God, while remaining close to human preoccupations. An intense spiritual life, which enables him to enter more deeply into communion with the Lord, will help him to allow God's love to possess him, so that he can proclaim to men and women that this love stops short at nothing. Moreover, by faithfully living chastity in celibacy, the priest shows that his whole being is a gift of himself to God and to his brothers and sisters.

I therefore ask you to watch over your priests with fatherly concern, and to encourage unity and a fraternal life among them. May they find in you a brother who listens to them and supports them in difficult moments, and a friend who encourages them to go ahead with their personal life and with the proclamation of the Gospel!

In your quinquennial reports, you underlined the urgent need for the formation of lay people. In fact, deepening the faith is essential if they are to be able to resist returning to former practices, to stand up to the pressure of the sects, and especially, to account for Christian hope in a complex

world that is experiencing new and serious problems.

I encourage you particularly to give catechists, whose devotion to the Church I acknowledge, a solid formation that will enable them to take on the mission entrusted to them, while living their faith consistently.

The faithful, particularly those who are involved in intellectual, political and economic milieus, will find the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* a fundamental instrument for formation and evangelization with a view to their human and spiritual growth and their mission in the world.

If the Church is to be an increasingly comprehensible sign of what she is and be increasingly suited to her mission, the task of inculturation of the faith is indispensable. This process, so important for proclaiming the Gospel to all cultures, must not jeopardize the specificity and integrity of the faith but must help Christians to understand and live the Gospel message better in their own culture, and enable them to give up practices that contradict their baptismal commitments.

As you mentioned in your reports, the burden of the traditional mindset is frequently an obstacle to accepting the Gospel. Thus, one of the most important requirements to present to the faithful is fidelity in the Sacrament of Marriage.

Polygamy or de facto cohabitation without a religious ceremony are often major obstacles. It is therefore necessary to persevere in your efforts to bring people, especially young people, readily to accept that for Christians, marriage is a path to holiness. "Marriage thus demands an indissoluble love; thanks to this stability it can contribute effectively to the complete fulfilment of the spouses' baptismal vocation" (*Ecclesia in Africa*, n. 83).

Lastly, I would also like to point out with interest the development in your Dioceses of ecclesial movements that contribute to giving a renewed missionary impulse to Christian communities. I invite the members of these groups to increasingly deepen their personal knowledge of Christ and to give themselves to him generously, while remaining deeply rooted in the faith of the Church.

However, these movements must be the focus of enlightened and constant discernment on the Bishops' part, so as to guarantee the ecclesiality of their approach and to maintain an authentic communion with the universal and the diocesan Church.

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate, in concluding this meeting I would like to remind you of the affection of the Successor of Peter for the People of Côte d'Ivoire, addressing to them once again a pressing appeal: "I invite all to continue with constructive dialogue, in order to attain reconciliation and peace" (Angelus, 22 January 2006; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 25 January, p. 1).

I entrust you as well as the priests, men and women religious, catechists and all the members of your Dioceses to the intercession of Our Lady, Queen of Peace. I very cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing to you all.

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