



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE BISHOPS OF GABON
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Friday, 26 October 2007

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,

I greet you with joy, Pastors of the Church in Gabon, hoping that your *ad limina* visit has been a strong time of ecclesial communion and spiritual life. You thus strengthen your apostolic mission to be increasingly servants and guides of the people who have been entrusted to you. I thank Bishop Timothée Modibo-Nzockena of Franceville, President of your Episcopal Conference, for the pastoral picture he has presented to me. In your ministry, with the living forces of your Dioceses, you are called to develop an increasingly organic pastoral approach on the diocesan and national levels. Likewise, you should organize your Bishops' Conference in an increasingly suitable way, in your meetings and in the structures put in place to help you. By sharing your pastoral wealth and projects you will be able to instil new dynamism in your Dioceses. The greater the communion among you and among all Catholics, the stronger and more effective your evangelization will be.

The Gabonese sometimes allow themselves be attracted by a consumer society and by permissiveness, and are therefore less attentive to the Country's poorest people. I encourage them to develop their sense of brotherhood and solidarity. One observes a certain laxity in the life of Christians, caught up by the world's seductions. I hope that with regard to spiritual and moral values their conduct may become more and more exemplary.

Among the urgent tasks of the Church in Gabon, it would be right first of all to note the transmission of the faith and the deepening of knowledge of the Christian mystery. In order to stand up to enticements, the faithful need to receive a thorough formation that will give them the possibility of basing their Christian life on clear principles. This implies that you organize the structures of formation in such a way that they are truly effective. Do not be afraid of training capable priests and lay people for this task. Thus, Ecclesial Communities will be livelier, and in the

liturgy and in personal, family and community prayer the faithful will find the strength to be in all areas of social life witnesses of the Good News and artisans of reconciliation, justice and peace, of whom our world has greater need than ever.

As successors of the Apostles, you are like fathers for the members of your Dioceses, called to pay special attention to your Country's youth. May all Christians, and especially parents, be mobilized to invite young people to open their hearts to Christ and to follow him. The Lord desires to give each one the grace of a beautiful and good existence and the hope that makes it possible to find life's true meaning through the dangers of daily life. Moreover, I hope that young people will not be afraid to be the first evangelizers of their peers. It is often through friendship and sharing that the latter are able to discover the Person of Christ and become attached to him.

You emphasize in your reports that vocations to the priesthood and the consecrated life are still scarce. The absence of young people who agree to hear the Lord's call always causes a Pastor suffering. The presence of the seminary in Libreville must be for all of you the object of very special attention, because it is the future of evangelization and of the Church which is at stake; this will not fail to be an incentive to the development and intensification of the pastoral care of vocations in each Diocese. May priests, men and women religious as well as families be mobilized by prayer, the guidance of the youngest and concern to transmit Christ's call, so that the vocations your Country needs may be born and fulfilled. Nor can we forget the role of Catholic teaching, in which the duty of teachers and educators is the integral education of young people; this requires the witness and transmission of faith as well as attention to vocations. I also want to give thanks with you for all the missionaries, men and women, who have enabled your Country to receive the seed of the Gospel. May they be thanked for the work they have done and continue to do with faithfulness in collaboration with the Pastors of Gabon.

My affectionate thoughts go to the priests, whose generosity in the ministry I acknowledge. By ceaselessly developing their life in intimacy with Christ they will have a deeper awareness of the demand of fidelity to commitments made before God and before the Church, especially to obedience and chastity in celibacy. Thus, they will increasingly live their priestly ministry as a service to the faithful. May they also remember that in their ministry they are part of a presbyterum around the Bishop. They will find spiritual support in priestly brotherhood, comforted by you who are fathers and brothers to them; you will then be able to achieve common pastoral projects that will give the mission a new impetus. I urge each priest to seek first the good of the Church and not his personal interests, conforming his life and mission to the act of the washing of the feet (cf. Jn 13: 1-11). Such love, lived in a perspective of disinterested service, gives rise to profound joy.

Take the Pope's greetings back to your priests, to all the people who collaborate in pastoral life, to all the faithful and to all the Gabonese. As I entrust you to the intercession of the Virgin Mary, Star of Evangelization, I impart my Apostolic Blessing to you and all the members of your Dioceses.

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