



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE BISHOPS OF BURKINA FASO AND OF NIGER
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Saturday, 20 March 2010

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

I welcome you with great joy, you who have been entrusted with the pastoral care of the Church which is in Burkina Faso and in Niger. I greet in particular the President of your Bishops' Conference, Archbishop Séraphin Rouamba of Koupéla, and thank him for his kind words. Please convey to the members of your dioceses and to all your countries' inhabitants, and in particular the sick and those in hardship, the Pope's encouragement and affectionate greetings. The *ad limina* visit that you are making is a concrete sign of communion between your particular Churches and the universal Church, which is expressed in a significant manner in your bond with the Successor of Peter. I hope that the reinforcement of this unity between you within the heart of the Church may strengthen your ministry and increase the credibility of the witness of Christ's disciples.

After more than a century, evangelization has already borne abundant fruit, visible in so many signs of vitality of the Church-family of God in your countries. May a new missionary impetus enliven your communities, so that the Gospel message may be fully accepted and faithfully lived! Faith always needs its roots to be consolidated if it is not to revert to former practices or to those that are incompatible with following Christ, and in order to resist the enticements of a world at times hostile to the Gospel ideal. I acknowledge the efforts you have been making for many years for a healthy inculturation of the faith. You will watch over its continuation through the work of competent people, with respect for the laws and with reference to the appropriate structures. Moreover, I encourage you to continue the wonderful missionary effort of solidarity for the Sister Churches on your continent which you have generously undertaken!

The recent Synodal Assembly for Africa asked the Christian communities to confront the

challenges of reconciliation, justice and peace. I am delighted to know that in different ways the Church is continuing in your dioceses to combat the evils that prevent the population from achieving authentic development. Indeed, the grave floods of last September afforded an opportunity to promote solidarity to all, especially to the most deprived. This solidarity, rooted in love of God, must be an ongoing commitment of the ecclesial community: your faithful have once again generously shown this with regard to the victims of the recent earthquake in Haiti, despite their own pressing needs. I warmly thank them. And lastly I would like to acknowledge in particular the work carried out by the *John Paul II Foundation for the Sahel* which celebrated its 25th anniversary last year in Ouagadougou.

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate, the Year for Priests is an opportunity to highlight the greatness of the priesthood and to promote inner renewal in the life of priests, so that their ministry may always be more intense and fruitful. The priest is first and foremost a man of God who seeks to respond ever more consistently to his vocation and mission at the service of the people entrusted to him, whom he must lead to God. For this reason it is necessary to assure him a solid formation, not only at the time of his preparation for ordination but throughout his ministry. Indeed, it is indispensable that the priest take the time to examine his priestly life deeply, to avoid slipping into activism. May the example of St John Mary Vianney inspire in the hearts of your priests, whose courageous missionary commitment I acknowledge, a renewed awareness of the total gift of themselves to Christ and to the Church, nourished by a fervent life of prayer and the passionate love of Jesus Christ!

Catechists are the indispensable collaborators of priests in the proclamation of the Gospel. They have an essential role, not only in the first evangelization and in the catechumenate, but also in the animation and support of your communities, in close liaison with other pastoral agents. Through you, I would like to greet them warmly and to encourage them in their task as evangelizers of their brothers and sisters. Your dioceses are exerting themselves with a view to guaranteeing catechists a human, intellectual, spiritual and pastoral formation, thereby permitting them to assure their service with faith and competence. I rejoice at this and encourage you to go ahead, while at the same time seeing to their material needs so that they may lead a worthy life.

In order that lay people may find their place in your communities and in society, it is necessary to increase the means of consolidating their faith. By developing institutions for formation, you will offer them the opportunity to exercise responsibility in the Church and in society and be authentic witnesses of the Gospel. I suggest you give special attention to the political and intellectual elites in your countries, who are often confronted with ideologies opposed to a Christian concept of man and of society. A sound faith, founded on a personal relationship with Christ, expressed in the regular practice of charity and upheld by a living community, is a support in the development of Christian life. Therefore give young people, who are often full of generosity, a taste for seeking to encounter Christ! The reinforcement of school and university chaplaincies will help them find in him the Light that can guide them throughout their lives and give them the true meaning of human

love.

The good atmosphere that habitually exists in interreligious relations enables the deepening of ties of esteem and friendship, as well as collaboration among all the members of society. Teaching the young generations the fundamental values of respect and brotherhood will encourage mutual understanding. May the bonds that unite Christians and Muslims in particular continue to be reinforced, to further peace and justice for the common good, rejecting every temptation to violence or intolerance!

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate, as I bring our meeting to a close I entrust each one of your dioceses to the Virgin Mary's motherly protection. In this time, marked by uncertainty, may she give you the strength to look confidently to the future! May she be a sign of hope for the peoples of Burkina Faso and Niger. I warmly impart an affectionate Apostolic Blessing to you and to the priests, men and women religious, catechists and all the faithful of your dioceses.

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