



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
TO MADAGASCAR, LA RÉUNION,
ZAMBIA AND MALAWI

EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION AT «KWACHA PARK»

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Blantyre (Malawi)

Friday, 5 May 1989

“It was necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory” (Cfr. Luc. 24, 26)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. In the name of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, *the Bishop of Rome greets the Church in Malawi*. Today’s celebration is a sign of the universality of Christ’s Church, which is built upon the foundation of the Apostles with Peter at the head as a lasting and visible source and foundation of unity (Cfr. *Lumen Gentium*, 18).

At the same time I wish to greet all the people of this African nation. The Church proclaims and professes the truth about Christ, the Redeemer of the world, *to all the sons and daughters of this land*, to whom she feels especially close. I know that the citizens of Malawi are religious people who have always sought God’s help and protection for their country. I pray that he will bestow upon all of you many spiritual and material blessings, so that you may grow in *your love for him and for one another*, and for all people of every race and nation.

2. Today we celebrate the Liturgy of the Lord’s Ascension. The Scriptures tell us that forty days after he rose from the dead, Christ *“was taken up” to heaven*. We read in the Acts of the Apostles that they witnessed the return of the Lord to the Father: “He was lifted up, and a cloud took him out

of their sight” (*Act. 1, 9*).

But *before this*, during the forty days that followed his Resurrection, Christ “*presented himself*” to the Apostles and spoke to them about the Kingdom of God (Cfr. *ibid. 1, 3*). We are told that “he charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, *but to wait for the promise of the Father*” (*Ibid. 1, 4*).

Before his Passion, Christ had already promised the Apostles *that the Father would send the Paraclete – the Comforter – the Holy Spirit*. And after the Resurrection he said: “You shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit” (*Ibid. 1, 5*). Indeed the Spirit is the one who accomplishes the baptism of conversion, immersing man in the grace of divine life. *By means of this promise Jesus prepared* his disciples for the day when he would leave this world for the Father.

3. *In Jesus Christ the power of God is revealed*: “the immeasurable greatness of his power”, as we read in the Letter to the Ephesians (*Eph. 1, 19*). This letter of Saint Paul goes on to say that “the working of (God’s) great might “was accomplished in Christ “*when he raised him from the dead and made him sit at his right hand... above every name that is named*” (*Ibid. 1, 20-21*). Yes, above every other name under heaven, “not only in this age but also in that which is to come” (*Ibid. 1, 21*). God has exalted the Crucified and Risen Christ *as Lord of all*.

Christ is the Son who is of one being with the Father. And *in him* – in the Son – *God revealed himself as Father*. Christ is the fullness of God’s self-revelation in human history. He is “the fullness of him who fills all in all” (*Act. 1, 23*). The Father “has put all things under his feet” (*Ibid. 1, 22*). *As Redeemer and Lord, Christ is “the head of the Church, which is his body*” (Cfr. *Ibid. 1, 22-23*). This is the truth proclaimed to us in today’s Liturgy by the Letter to the Ephesians. This is the truth about Christ’s Ascension.

4. *At the Ascension the Risen Christ speaks to the Apostles one last time about the coming of the Holy Spirit*. He says: “*You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you shall be my witnesses* in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth” (*Act. 1, 8*). We read these words in the Acts of the Apostles. We read the same in today’s Gospel. Both texts were written by *the Evangelist Luke*.

The coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost *marks the beginning of the Church’s mission*. The Apostles received this mission from Christ. The Holy Spirit gave them the power to fulfil it by word and deed even to the shedding of their blood. Martyrdom is the ultimate testimony to the truth about Christ crucified and risen. *Following in the foot-steps of the Apostles the Church has inherited the same mission, and she fulfils it in the midst of all the nations*.

Dear brothers and sisters: it is now a *hundred years since the Church was implanted in this land*. The first Catholic missionaries arrived at Mponda in 1889. Like the Apostles they too had heard the Lord’s command to “preach repentance and forgiveness of sins... in his name to all nations”

(*Luc. 24, 47*). They gave themselves unselfishly in order that the *Good News of salvation* might find a home in the hearts of all. They sowed the seed. The Lord has given the growth.

Since that humble beginning the Church has taken root in Malawi and has produced *a rich harvest for the Gospel*. This is shown by the large number of Catholics, their lively faith, the many vocations to the priesthood and religious life, and the eagerness of dedicated lay men and women to serve the Church community and to *bring the faith to others*.

After a century of growth, you now have *seven dioceses: Blantyre, Chikwawa, Dedza, Lilongwe, Mangochi, Mzuzu and Zomba*. In every part of this country the Church's sons and daughters are spreading the joy and enthusiasm of the Holy Spirit. They are bearing witness to Christ in obedience to his command. They are blessing God for all his mighty deeds.

5. At the same time, like the first Apostles, like the early missionaries in Malawi and like Christians in every age, we must recognize that *the Lord is always calling the Church to renewal*. If we are to "preach repentance and the forgiveness of sins" to others, we ourselves must first "*be converted and live*".

This is the theme of my pastoral visit among you, and I gladly join your bishops in inviting you to *reflect more deeply on the meaning of your life in Christ*. It is good that you should challenge one another to grow in faith, hope and love; that you should ask yourselves how far justice, peace and reconciliation have transformed *the way you live*; that you should strive to conform your lives more perfectly to the mysteries of faith that you celebrate every Sunday (Cfr. EPISC. MAMAVIAE *Epistula ad Catholicos*, die 6 ian. 1989). "*Be converted and live*": these words are *a lifelong challenge to all of us, to grow in holiness* as sons and daughters of God.

I hope that my visit will help you, as individuals and as a community of faith, to be *more like Christ every day*, and help you to persevere in living the Gospel. Our mission as members of the Church is to *allow the Holy Spirit to transform us* and all of humanity *through his power*, now that the Son is seated "at God's right hand".

Even though we can no longer see Christ, he assures us that *we are seeing him with the eyes of faith* in the needy. We are told that at the final judgement both the righteous and unrighteous will ask, "Lord when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison?" And he will answer that what we did or failed to do for the least of our brothers and sisters we did to him (Cfr. *Matth. 25, 31-46*). Therefore it is Christ whom you welcome to Malawi whenever you show love and kindness to *the refugee* who comes to your country from Mozambique in search of safety, food and shelter. Some of you have even welcomed Christ in this way into your villages and homes. You can also *see him* in the handicapped. Whenever you help such people to take their rightful place in society, you are helping Christ. This also applies to the *love and care you show for the sick and dying*. Today a growing number of people suffer from AIDS. We must treat

them as we would treat Christ himself. We must “be converted and live” through active charity, *through the power of love*.

6. When Christ returned to the Father, the Apostles “were gazing into heaven as he went” (Act. 1, 10), “as cloud took him out of their sight” (*Ibid.* 1, 9) *the cloud being a sign of God’s presence, as we see so often in the Old Testament*. The Apostles also heard these words: “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? *This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven*” (*Ibid.* 1, 11). This means that the Church must accomplish her *mission* on earth *with hope* in the Second Coming of Christ.

When will this happen? We can reply with the Master’s own words: “It is not for you to know times or seasons *which the Father has fixed by his own authority*” (*Ibid.* 1, 7). The time of Christ’s Second Coming at the end of the world must therefore be left to the Father. In the meantime we, members of the Church, must be watchful and ready. We must also *do everything possible to prepare the world for Christ’s final Coming-for Judgement*.

7. Dear brothers and sisters who are the Church of Jesus Christ here in this land: on the occasion of our gathering today I pray “*that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him*”. May he *truly enlighten “the eyes of your hearts”, “that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe*” (Eph. 1, 17-19).

Let us pray for this, especially as we look forward to Pentecost. *Let us pray together with the Apostles*, and particularly Saint Paul, the Apostle to the Nations, who carried the name of Christ to the whole world of his time.

Father of glory, hear our prayer, and grant that “*the eyes of the heart may be enlightened*” for all the people here today, *your beloved sons and daughters in Christ*. Amen.