



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO SENEGAL, THE GAMBIA AND GUINEA

**EUCCHARISTIC CONCELEBRATION
FOR THE FAITHFUL OF THE DIOCESE OF BANJUL**

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Independence Stadium, Banjul (The Gambia)

Sunday, 23 February 1992

Nekal horom u aduna si!

Nekaò ler u aduna si!

(Be the salt of the earth!

Be the light of the world!) (Cf. Mt. 5, 13-16).

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. These words, chosen as the theme of the Papal visit to The Gambia, echo the Sermon on the Mount and are a vivid reminder of your Christian identity and mission in the world. For a long time I have wished to come to you, to confirm you in your profession of faith and to encourage you in your Christian life, "so that, seeing your good works, (all) may give praise to your Father in heaven" (*Ibid.* 5, 16) .

Suma nawle Bishop Cleary – njabalekat yi nyi jaybalu ngir yon nyepa ni boka chi jangu kotolic bi chi Gambia: suma mboki kerchen yi, nyi nyu boka di haru – "sunyu yakar ju tehe – nyow u ndam u sonyu yalla ju maga bi ak sunyu musackat Yesu Krista:

Suma haritu serieng si, sen tewai chi hewte gi ni wone na mandarga harito te di firnday legaye gu maga gi serienge si ak kerchen yi muna def di utu jama ak njem kanam:

(Dear Bishop Cleary and all the priests, Religious and laity of the Diocese of Banjul:

Dear fellow-Christians, with whom we await "our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ" (Ti. 2, 13):

Dear Muslim Friends, whose presence at this celebration is a sign of friendship and a token of the great work that Christians and Muslims can do together in the cause of peace and progress):

The Successor of Saint Peter meets the Catholic community of The Gambia on this first day of the week, to celebrate the memorial of the Lord's Passover from death to new life. *Around this altar, the pilgrim Church in The Gambia is drawn into communion with the Blessed Trinity: the Father gives us the Son, so that we may be filled with his Holy Spirit.* Here – in Independence Stadium, at Bakau, in The Gambia, in West Africa – we lift up our hearts to God in praise and thanksgiving for his gifts to the Church in this land.

2. Before all else we give thanks for the way in which God has established and built up his Church, first at the mouth of the River Gambia and then along its banks.

It is true that from the fifteenth century until recent times, outside interest in West Africa was often motivated by commercial and political ambition, when it did not involve the terrible scourge and evil of the slave-trade. However, that dark picture was partly lightened *by the outstanding example of Christian men and women who had the true love of God in their hearts* and wished only to serve the needs and well-being of the peoples of this region. I recall one significant example: Blessed Anne Marie Javouhey, who came to Saint Mary's Island with three companions in 1821 to care for the sick, so that in their suffering they would know the tender compassion of Christ.

Nanyu len gerem jaybalekat yi njayka indi hibaar bu neh bi di ligil bi chi rew mi.

(We give thanks for the missionaries who first brought the Gospel to this land).

In obedience to Christ's call, these courageous men and women left their own lands and came to The Gambia, in order to make known the mystery of salvation, to bear witness to the truths and values of the Gospel, to educate the young and to care for the needy.

To all who are listening to my voice I wish to say that *the age of the Missions is not over; Christ still needs generous men and women to become heralds of the Good News to the ends of the earth.* Do not be afraid to follow him. Share freely with others the faith you have received! "No believer in Christ, no institution of the Church can avoid this supreme duty: to proclaim Christ to all peoples" (John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 3) .

3. At this Mass we give thanks to God that, from the tiny seed which the first missionaries planted,

the Church in The Gambia has grown and is bearing abundant fruits of faith, hope and love. With affection I greet each priest and seminarian who is a native son of The Gambia, each Religious who is child of this land. In love I greet the laity, young and old, the parents of families, the children, the catechumens and, especially, the catechists and the members of the various Catholic Associations.

Mange nuyu wa Bakau, Lamén, Banjul ak Serekunda nyi fayto sowu ak nyepa nyi jogay chi kaw gi – wa Brikama, Bouyam ak Soma Farafeni, Kuntaur, bansang ak Basse.

(I greet the people from Bakau, Lamin, Banjul and Serrekunda here in the West, as well as those from up-country: from Brikama, Bwiam and Soma; from Farafenni, Kuntaur, Bansang and Basse).

4. Dear brothers and sisters, today's reading from Saint Paul (1Cor. 15, 45-49) explains that *our true destiny is to pass from a "material" and earthly life to a "spiritual" and higher life in Christ*. In the beginning God breathed a "living soul" (Gen. 2, 7) into the first man, and Adam became a "living being" (1Cor. 15, 45), the head and father of the entire human family in the order of nature. We are all the offspring of the first Adam, the man of dust, subject to the tyranny of sin and death (Cf. *ibid.* 15, 49).

But by God's grace in Baptism we have been recreated in the likeness of the second Adam, Jesus, the Son of the Father (Cf. Lk. 3, 38). He too is a source of life for the whole human family: of a *new life, which flows from "the life-giving spirit"* (*Ibid.* 3, 45). This new life will appear in a definitive way at the moment of our resurrection, when even our earthly bodies will pass from death to immortality. Then we shall fully bear the image of the man of heaven, freed from the corruption of sin and death (Cf. *ibid.* 3, 49). In fact, that image is already impressed on us, and is apparent in all our efforts to live by grace and to do the works of grace.

The All-Holy God has shared his own life with us sinners, out of the overflowing abundance of his love. Our first response then is to sing his praises before all the world: "*O my soul, bless the Lord! All that is within me, bless his holy name!*" (Ps. 102 (101), 1. 2.). When we gather to pray, let us never forget his love and mercy. He has crowned us with the resplendent glory of the Saviour! (Cf. *ibid.* 2b-4)

5. Because we have died to sin and been raised up to God's own life, we must *walk always in this new life* (Cf. Rom. 6, 4-11). This new life, which began at Baptism, develops in us as we grow into the likeness of Christ who "humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross" (Phil. 2, 8). Having been transformed from children of the old Adam into brothers and sisters of the new Adam, we are filled with his savour and aflame with his light.

Naka Krista bi nyun it war nanyo don horom u aduna si sepa-di ler u aduna si sepa.

(Like Christ, we too must be salt for the whole earth, light for the whole world).

Salt gives flavour and preserves. Light enables us to walk without stumbling. To be salt and light means to perform the works of evangelical love, works whereby the compassion of Christ touches those who are troubled in spirit or afflicted in body, works which transform human activity into a resplendent revelation of God's presence and his merciful love. From the start, the Catholic community in The Gambia followed the pattern set forth in the Reading from Isaiah which we have heard today: *its works of love caused a great light to shine in this land* (Cf. *Is. 58, 7-10*).

Insofar as you continue to act as the Prophet indicates, you cause the light of Christ to radiate up and down the banks of the River Gambia. When you supply the needs of the poor, relieve those bearing the yoke of oppression and battle against wickedness (Cf. *ibid. 58, 7. 9b. 10*), the Lord Jesus himself is at work in you, to shatter the darkness of sin and scatter the gloom of despair.

6. Today our world cries out for salt and light from God. Africa needs this savour and fire in order to preserve what is good and just in its traditional culture and values; in order to direct its search for solutions to its pressing problems; in order to enlighten and guide with wisdom its efforts to achieve greater development and a better life for its peoples.

Ne kalen horom, ak ler dimale Gambia m'u tahaw bo bah chi li mo heh.

(Be salt, be light, in order to help The Gambia to face these challenges!).

In a particular way, your nation needs the witness of strong Christian family life, for it is above all in the heart of a united and loving family that the young learn essential values and the Christian attitude to the realities and relationships through which we journey to our transcendent destiny.

"The family is the first and fundamental school of social living" (John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 37). It teaches the value of human dignity. It teaches respect for each one's rights. It teaches true justice and solidarity. The communion and constant sharing involved in everyday life in the home is the best training for an active and responsible sharing in the wider life of society.

The truth about the family receives a ready acceptance in the hearts of African men and women, because the strength of Africa has always been the family: *Dole Afrika dafa mus di don njabot gi*. Your society has been built upon the bonds which expand from the love of husband and wife to embrace children and all who make up the extended family. Your culture's respect for the family shows how you have always prized the family's fundamental role in God's plan. As Christian families, you are called to pass on to future generations this great inheritance, and to strengthen and ennoble it with the grace of the Sacrament of Marriage.

Faithful, exclusive and persevering love between husband and wife is a gift to be asked for in prayer. Prayer strengthens the unity of all the family members. *Prayer is a fundamental part of the*

family's role as the "domestic Church", when parents and children together humbly and confidently ask God's grace and aid (Cf. John Paul II, Familiaris Consortio, 59). My appeal to all of you is to strengthen family life, for your own happiness, for the good of the Church, for the welfare of society as a whole.

7. Christians know that their faith obliges them *to work with their fellow-citizens for the common good, and to support all that is noble and good in the life of their country* (Cf. Lumen Gentium, 36). By promoting reconciliation and peace, through honesty and integrity in your relationships with others, through your solidarity with the poor and the needy, you make a lasting contribution to the future of your nation. Do not be concerned that you are a "little flock" (Cf. *Lk.* 12, 32).

A little salt can enhance all the other ingredients in a dish. A little candle can give light to everyone in a room.

There is another reason why this Mass is a joyful prayer of thanksgiving. Side by side with the Christians here today there are *many followers of Islam*.

Beg nanyu ngir ne sonyu harit u seringe u bare hgi fi tew.

(We are happy that so many Muslim friends are present).

Dear Friends, the revelation which we Christians have received is the "gospel of peace" (*Eph.* 6, 15). It is a message of reconciliation with God and between all God's children. Far from being a source of rivalry or division, it urges us to solidarity and mutual respect. *Its very proclamation must be an act of peace*, an expression of utmost respect for the dignity and conscience of our hearers. The Catholic Church is grateful for your appreciation of this truth. I pray that the Christians and Muslims of this nation will continue to build upon the good which they find in each other and thus ensure The Gambia's development and progress as a just and enlightened society in which all its members can play their rightful part.

8. Catholics of The Gambia! Christ is calling you to be salt for every part of this nation and light for every aspect of Gambian society. The Holy Spirit who has been given to you (Cf. *Rom.* 5, 5) brings grace and truth, not for your own sake alone but for the life of the world (Cf. *Jn.* 1, 17; 6, 33). The challenge before you is arduous, but our Heavenly Father sustains you. He gives you the Bread of Life and the Cup of Salvation.

Receive this gift with confidence, that it may build you up in love. Let the Eucharist be your strength and joy. Let it also be *the programme of your Christian life – to be more closely united in Christ, Pastors with your people, all of you one in heart and mind, in solidarity with all your fellow-citizens in promoting the common good.*

Yonel sa hel mu sela mi chi sunu i hol yi te esalal sunu i yiw u batise.

Olbatil sunu i hol yi. Degeral len ndah nyu sede ak baneh lepa li yegle bu neeh bi santane. Dimbali nyu yoka sunu ngum ndah nyu di dimbalante chi jubo ak nohofel. Amen.

(Send your Holy Spirit into our hearts and renew in us the grace of Baptism. Change our hearts, strengthen them, so that we may witness with joy to the Gospel message.

Help us to deepen our faith so that we can serve you and each other in unity and love. Amen).