



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
TO BENIN, UGANDA AND KHARTOUM (SUDAN)

EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Sports Grounds, Soroti (Uganda)

Tuesday, 9 February 1993

"What must we do, then?" (Lk. 3: 10).

Ikaitotoi angakaitotoi alotooma Kristo,
(Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,)

1. The crowds came to John the Baptist on the banks of the River Jordan. They heard his preaching. They took his words to heart. And so they responded by asking: "What must we do, then?" (Ibid.).

The Baptist was sent by God in the fullness of time, when "*all mankind would see the salvation of God*" (Cf. *ibid.* 3, 6). He was God's messenger, a Prophet. The last and greatest of the Prophets. He was the voice crying in the wilderness: "Prepare a way for the Lord, make his paths straight!... If you are repentant, produce the appropriate fruits" (Ibid. 3: 4.8).

His message was the ever valid and ever urgent message of repentance, which God addressed to the human family from the beginning, from the first moment of rebellion, through all the pages of the history of salvation. God repeatedly called sinful man to works of conversion and repentance, just as through Isaiah, who speaks to us in today's liturgy: "Break unjust fetters... share your bread with the hungry, and shelter the homeless poor; ...clothe the man you see naked, and do not turn from your own kin" (Is. 58: 6-7). In every age this dialogue between God and needy humanity goes

on. So from the Prophets down to John the Baptist, *the call is always the same: a call to repentance and conversion*. Here today in Eastern Uganda, the whole people of God is being challenged to heed God's call to change, to aspire to a better and higher Christian life: "*Prepare a way for the Lord, make his paths straight!*" (Lk. 3: 4).

2. Dear Brothers and Sisters, I give heartfelt thanks to God who has let me come to visit you and to fulfil the ministry of the Successor of Peter in this part of your country. I greet Bishop Erasmus Wandera of Soroti and the other Bishops of the Eastern Dioceses: Bishop Denis Kiwanuka of Kotido, Bishop Henry Ssentongo of Moroto and Bishop James Odongo of Tororo. I express my affection for *the priests*: those who are sons of this land, and the Mill Hill Fathers, the White Fathers, the Verona Fathers and all who have come here to minister to God's people, showing that the Church is a universal communion in which we are all responsible for one another.

Men and women Religious, both from abroad or sons and daughters of the local Churches of this region, your very consecration places you at the heart of the Church's evangelizing mission. I express to you the Pope's gratitude, and I wish to encourage you to bear joyful witness in your life and work to the perennial truths and values of Christ's Kingdom.

Catechists and members of the laity, it is with profound joy that I celebrate this Eucharist here in Soroti and pray with you for your needs and for the good of the whole Ugandan people.

I greet the members of other Christian Churches and Ecclesial Communities who are with us at this solemn event, and I welcome the followers of all the other religious traditions who are present here today.

3. "*What must we do, then?*" (Lk. 3: 10).

This same question arises in our own hearts. Just as in the Old Testament the Prophets answered, and John the Baptist answered, and in the New Testament Jesus answered, so *the Church must respond to the "old" and "new" questions* which man poses. She must seek a response to the questions which affect the different communities and societies to which people belong.

But when the men and women of our day ask what they must do, the Church cannot fail to give the answer given by Christ himself: "*Repent and believe the Good News*" (Mk. 1, 15). *To repent* is to sin no more (Cf. Jn. 8: 11). It is to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul and with all our mind, and to love our neighbour as ourself (Cf. Matth. 22: 38-39). It is to be perfect as our Heavenly Father is perfect (Cf. *ibid.* 5: 48). To believe the Good News is to hear the words of John the Baptist: "Look, there is the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world" (Jn. 1: 29), and as a result to place our whole trust in Christ, the Redeemer who alone has the words of eternal life (Cf. *ibid.* 6: 68).

It is through *the upright and holy lives of her members, and through their unshakable fidelity to Christ*, that the Church grows among each people and in every part of the world. A clear example is the significance of the Uganda Martyrs for the life of the Christian community in this land. Over a hundred years ago, the noble Mulumba Matthias Kalemba acknowledged to Father Livinhac of the White Fathers that he had been searching for an answer to the question of what must be done. When he was dying, his foster-father Magatto, of the Musu clan, told Matthias that men would one day come "to teach the right way". From his father he had learned to hunger for the light of truth, and when in God's Providence it arrived, Matthias seized the precious gift of the Good News of salvation, never to let it go, even though it was to cost him his life.

The present generation of Ugandan Catholics must not let the light which the Martyrs caused to shine upon this land be dimmed!

4. When the Bishops of Uganda came to Rome for their *ad Limina* visit last May, we discussed some of the major questions facing the Church in this part of Africa. Then, in preparation for this visit, they published a *Pastoral Letter* in which they spoke of the programme of the Church's action for the years leading up to the new Millennium, and they proposed that this visit by the Pope should serve as a reflection on the theme: "*Your light must shine in the sight of people, so that seeing your good works, they give praise to your Father in heaven*" (Matth. 5: 16). At each stage of this brief but intense visit I have referred to some particular aspect of what the Church in Uganda is called to do in order to prepare a brighter future for the People of God and in order to build a more just and united, humane and peaceful society (Cf. Epist. Pastoralis *Let Your Light Shine*, 2).

Among the "areas of priority" of the Catholic community of Uganda, *the fundamental task of evangelization holds first place*. Evangelization in fact is the realization of what John the Baptist calls for in today's Gospel:

"Prepare the way of the Lord,
make straight his paths...
Winding ways will be straightened,
and rough roads made smooth,
and all mankind shall see the salvation of God" (Lk. 3: 4-6).

The fact that so many have not yet heard the Good News, and that some are lukewarm in their faith, means that the whole Christian community is being challenged to take seriously the mission to be apostles to others, the mission which each one has received in Baptism and Confirmation, and which is constantly nourished in the Eucharist (Epist. Pastoralis *Let Your Light Shine*, 30).

5. The mission to evangelize implies that Ugandan Christians must listen to the cries of all those in this country and throughout Africa pleading to be freed from so many forms of slavery: from ignorance, and from the oppression that weighs so heavily on the poor, the old and lonely, the

sick, refugees, the defenceless young, and in particular the orphans of war and the orphans left by the AIDS epidemic. They all need your preferential and practical love. Whatever you do for them you do to Christ himself (Cf. Matth. 25: 34-36).

Your Bishops have also urged the Church in Uganda to defend courageously *human life and human dignity*. Christians must make a clear and active option for justice: "Where justice is, peace flows like a river" (Epist. Pastoralis *Let Your Light Shine*, 35). Only by overcoming rivalry and hatred, only by putting aside the desire for revenge, only by forgiving and being reconciled, will the Christians of Uganda bear witness to the Light. Improving ecumenical relations, praying for Christian unity, fostering greater understanding and cooperation with the followers of Islam in human development and in building a new Uganda founded on justice and respect for human rights: all this is part of the task that lies before the Catholic community at the approach of a new Christian Millennium. I mention these points from your Bishops' *Pastoral Letter in order to confirm them, the Pastors, in their choice of priorities for the pastoral ministry during the coming years*. But also to encourage all Ugandan Catholics to reflect deeply on the question in the Gospel reading: "*What must we do, then?*" (Lk. 3: 10). Your Bishops have indicated the way forward. May the whole Catholic community respond: like a lamp on a lampstand where it gives light to all in the household (Cf. Matth. 5: 15).

6. The immediate future of the Church's life on this continent will be profoundly influenced by the *Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops*. This important event is meant to help the particular Churches in Africa to pass on the light of the Gospel in all its fullness to the men and women of the next generation. The Holy Spirit is calling the Catholic Church in Africa to a new Pentecost, a new realization of the power of God's love to sanctify the People of God and, through your work and testimony, to transform society and culture. Already, all over Africa people have been actively and fruitfully engaged in discussing the themes of the Assembly. Preparations for the Synod enter a new phase today in Kampala. I ask you to continue to pray for this important event, so that Africa will be bathed in God's light, the light which shone out in the blessed martyrdom of Saint Matthias, Saint Charles, Saint Musaka, Saint Kizito and all their glorious Companions.

7. "*All mankind shall see the salvation of God*" (Lk. 3: 6).

The light which God sent when he gave the world his Son (Cf. Jn. 3: 16) is meant for all peoples. The Baptist at the Jordan bore witness to the universal nature of redemption. Seeing Jesus coming towards him, John was moved by the Spirit of God to proclaim: "*Look, there is the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world*" (Ibid. 1: 29). John's words have remained at the very centre of the Mass: the offering of the bread and wine which, at this altar, will become the offering of Christ himself to the Father *for our salvation*. Yes, for the salvation of the world!

Today, in Soroti, I give thanks to God for being able to offer this Mass for the sanctification of

God's people in the Eastern region of Uganda. As the Successor of Saint Peter I have come to you to urge you to let your light shine in the sight of everyone, so that seeing your good works the whole of Africa will praise our Father in heaven (Cf. Matth. 5: 16).

Iterereng lo asuban Africa!

Iterereng lo asuban Uganda!

Iterereng lo asuban iyes dadang kere!

Amen.

(God bless Africa!

God bless Uganda!

God bless each one of you.

Amen.)