



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
TO CAMEROON, SOUTH AFRICA AND KENYA

**EUCCHARISTIC CONCELEBRATION
AT GOSFORTH PARK OF GERMISTON**

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

*Johannesburg (South Africa)
Sunday, 17 September 1995*

"Peace I bequeath to you, my own peace I give you" says the Lord (Jn. 14: 27).

In Afrikaans:

"Vrede laat ek vir julle na, my vrede gee ek aan julle", se die Here.

In Zulu:

"Uxolo ngilushiya kinina, uxolo lwami ngininika lona". Usho njalo uNkulunkulu.

In Sesotho:

"Ke le siela kgotso, ke le neha kgotso ea ka", ho rialo Morena.

In Xhosa:

"Uxolo ndilushiya kuni, uxolo lwami ndininika lona", utsho njalo uThixo.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. Every time we celebrate the Eucharist we hear these words before giving each other the sign of peace and receiving Holy Communion. These are the words of Jesus at the Last Supper, when he bade farewell to his disciples before going to his Passion and Death. He knew that his Passion

would be a great trial for them too, and so he said: "*Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid*" (Jn. 14: 27). It was as if he were anticipating the moment on Easter Sunday when he would come back to them through the closed doors of the Cenacle and would say to them: "*Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so am I sending you... Receive the Holy Spirit*" (Ibid. 20: 21-22).

Today I invoke this peace upon all the people of South Africa. I warmly greet Bishop Ormond, the Pastor of this local Church of Johannesburg, and all the members of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference, as well as those of the Inter-Regional Meeting of Bishops of Southern Africa. I greet the clergy, Religious and lay faithful; our brothers and sisters of the other Christian denominations and religious traditions; the civil authorities of city, province and nation.

I express a special word of greeting and gratitude to His Excellency, President Mandela, for his gracious presence as well as the vice presidents and other authorities.

The peace of Christ is not just any peace. It is none other than the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, "the Lord, the giver of life". On Holy Thursday Jesus called the Holy Spirit with the name of Advocate. He said: "I shall ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you for ever, that Spirit of truth whom the world can never receive, since it neither sees nor knows him" (Ibid. 14:16-17). *The Advocate, the Spirit of truth, is the real source of peace*: that peace which comes from God, and is stronger than anything that gives rise to anguish and concern in people's lives.

2. Meditating on today's Gospel we learn the truth about peace. We hear *the Gospel of peace* which, ever anew, the Church proclaims to humanity and to the world. Each year on 1 January the Church celebrates the "World Day of Peace" in order to draw attention to this immense good, and in order to implore it wherever it is lacking: as in Europe in the Balkans; and in Africa especially in Rwanda and Burundi, Sudan, Algeria, and until recently in the Republic of South Africa because of *apartheid*. The whole Church is comforted and people everywhere rejoice in the change that has come about in South Africa during the last few years. Seeing what is happening here, men and women of good will hope that in other parts of this Continent too, and throughout the world, violence will give way to dialogue and agreement, and the lives of innocent men, women and children will no longer be in danger for reasons which, more often than not, they neither share nor understand.

The Church believes that *peace is a gift from God*, but that it is at the same time *a task entrusted to us all*. To all of you: to my Brother Bishops, to the Catholic community of Johannesburg and of all the other Dioceses of South Africa and the neighbouring countries, to our brothers and sisters of the other Christian denominations, to the followers of other religious traditions, to all men and women whatever your origin, race or culture, I would repeat the words of today's reading from the Prophet Isaiah: "*Open up, open up, clear the way, remove all obstacles from the way of my people... Peace, peace to far and near*" (Is. 57: 14-19).

3. The invitation to work strenuously for true peace is the guiding thought of today's liturgical celebration here at Gosforth Park, where we are *gathered to present solemnly the results of the Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops* – the Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa*. In fact, one of the themes to which the Synod gave special attention is the connection between the Gospel of our salvation through faith in Jesus Christ and the advancement of justice and peace at every level of human relations.

This connection – always a part of the Church's thought and action – and the consequent duty of Christians to build a society worthy of their human dignity, was given new impetus by the Second Vatican Council, especially in the Pastoral Constitution "*Gaudium et Spes*", promulgated exactly 30 years ago. An immediate result of that renewed awareness of the link between evangelization and human liberation was the setting up of the Pontifical Council "Justice and Peace", which has its corresponding councils in each Episcopal Conference, and indeed in most Dioceses around the world.

Many excellent initiatives have come from the Pontifical Council over the years. Not least deserving of mention was the *Meeting at Assisi in 1986*, of Christians of all denominations and representatives of the world's religions, who gathered to pray for peace, which was gravely threatened at that particular moment in history. Can we not say that subsequent events have shown that that prayer in the City of St Francis has been truly heard, insofar as the changes in the world situation since then open new possibilities not only for the continents of Europe and America, but for peoples everywhere?

The changed world situation has had a profound effect on Africa. The time of ideological contrasts is over; the real problems of the peoples of Africa have to be tackled, with all available resources. The Apostolic Exhortation which we are here to celebrate does not offer a blueprint for material and political development, which is the competence of responsible citizens and leaders in each country. It offers *a vision of the moral duty which belongs to everyone*, and it indicates the path which the Church intends to follow to serve the integral well-being of the African peoples. The Church knows the immensity of the challenges involved. She therefore turns to her Lord and to the strength and inspiration that come from the transforming power of his word and sacramental presence.

4. "*Christ is our peace*" (Cf. Eph. 2: 14), says the reading from the Letter to the Ephesians. And St Paul adds this magnificent commentary: "*Now in Christ Jesus, you that used to be so far apart from us have been brought very close, by the blood of Jesus Christ*" (Eph. 2: 13). By giving his life to the Father, on the Cross, Christ became the fountainhead of a new relationship between individuals and peoples. St Paul explains it this way: "Christ has made the two parts of the human race into one and broken down the barrier which used to keep them apart, actually destroying in his own person the hostility" (Cf. *ibid.* 2: 14). He is referring to the way of thinking of Israel which separated the members of the Chosen People from the rest of peoples, who did not enter into

God's preference. If Jesus Christ has broken down the wall of separation, this means that in Christ all men and women, and all peoples, are chosen by God: "There are no more distinctions between Jew and Greek... but all of you are one in Christ Jesus", as St Paul writes in the Letter to the Galatians (Gal. 3: 28). Every discrimination of origin, race and language is overcome!

O primeiro desafio para os povos da África é actualmente o de *uma conversão à solidariedade*, com magnanimidade, mútuo perdão e reconciliação. Para alguns, estas palavras poderão soar muito acima da sua experiência e dos seus propósitos. Mas é o único caminho possível, para sair da completa falência moral dos preconceitos raciais e das rivalidades étnicas. A verdadeira solidariedade é possível, porque pertencemos todos à única família humana. A nossa criação à imagem de Deus é o *fundamento e a raiz da nossa dignidade humana, e, portanto, de qualquer direito, bem como dos direitos das nações*. A Morte e Ressurreição de Jesus Cristo conferem uma nova e superior motivação para o nosso empenho pela causa da paz e da solidariedade.

5. The Prophet Isaiah exclaims: "*Open up, clear the way, remove all obstacles from the way of my people*" (Is. 57: 14). The Synod for Africa addresses this call and this encouragement to all the peoples of this Continent. In a special way this call and encouragement goes out to *the women of Africa*. The Synod gave ample space to the special burdens which lie on you, to the specific injustices which you undergo, to the violence and crimes committed against you. The Church in Africa deplores whatever deprives you of your rights and the respect due to you (Cf. John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, 121).

The Church knows that you, the women of Africa, have an irreplaceable part to play in humanizing society. You are more sensitive to the implications of justice and the demands of peace because you are closer to the mystery of life and the wonder of its transmission. The Church therefore appeals to you in a special way to *respect, protect, love and serve life, every human life, from conception to natural death!* As mothers, you bring your children into life; you educate them for life. Every shedding of blood is a wound to your unique genius. With all your strength you tend to defend the life that was conceived in you, the life that is the object of your great love. History shows that wars are made above all by men. It has always been so, and it is still so today.

What can you do to change this situation? No one can teach as you can the reality of respect for every human being. *By educating in respect and love, you teach peace and serve peace*, in your families, in your countries and in the world. This was the theme of my "*World Day of Peace Message*" this year: *Women: Teachers of Peace*. And I have recently written a "Letter to the Women" of the World calling for *the dignity of women to be universally recognized* and urging an effective and intelligent *campaign for the promotion of women* (Cf. John Paul II, *Letter to Women*, 6).

6. Faced with the huge task of educating consciences to justice and peace, the Church turns to a woman for inspiration and help: to Mary the Mother of Christ, the Queen of Peace. Christians have

always invoked Mary in times of danger and difficulty. Let us entrust to her the advancement of justice and peace in Africa. I do so with all the more confidence, certain that if the teaching of the Synod is widely spread and practiced, the Church on this Continent will accompany its peoples to a life that is ever more worthy of their God-given dignity.

With Mary, the whole Church in Africa proclaims the greatness of the Lord, because he looks upon his needy people in order to rout the proud of heart and exalt the lowly; he fills the hungry with good things and comes to the help of his servants (Cf. Lk. 1: 46-52).

May God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ accomplish this in us. Amen.