



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE BISHOPS OF ETHIOPIA AND ERITREA

*To My Venerable Brothers
The Bishops of Ethiopia and Eritrea*

Filled with trust in the Lord I warmly greet Cardinal Paulos Tzadua, Archbishop emeritus of Addis Ababa, and the Pastors of the Church in Ethiopia and Eritrea. Prevented by the outbreak of hostilities between Ethiopia and Eritrea from easy access to one another in your own land, you have come to Rome in order to gather in one body as an Episcopal Conference. Building on the reflections and proposals of your *ad limina* visit of September 1997, you seek now to strengthen your collaboration on many common issues for the good of your local Churches.

The creation of the independent State of Eritrea and the ensuing period of peace and friendship between your countries were signs of hope after decades of armed uprisings. This transition from military aggression to fraternal harmony brought encouragement to other African nations, and the Church herself shared the satisfaction of your people and governments with the new prospects for mutual understanding and progress which arose. Thus the outbreak of hostilities last spring could not have been a cause of greater sorrow, as I have said on several occasions even as I appealed for a return to negotiations and concord. As Bishops and Pastors of the Catholic Church in Ethiopia and Eritrea, you are now in the process of preparing a message of peace to be addressed to your clergy, religious and laity, as well as to all Ethiopians and Eritreans of good will. The whole Church stands with you and supports every gesture of peace and every effort aimed at restoring unity and fraternity.

War brings nothing but tragedy and despair, reaping innocent victims as it destroys lives and homes, families and peoples. I repeat with urgency what I have said so many times in the past: every alternative to war must be pursued. God has blessed his children with an intelligence and creativity which can resolve tensions and conflict, and which can succeed in building a society whose cornerstone is respect for the inalienable dignity of every human person.

I know that this conviction is shared by the Eastern and Latin rite Catholic faithful of Ethiopia and Eritrea, and I am certain that the members of the other Churches and Ecclesial Communities in your two countries feel likewise. Similarly, your Muslim brothers and sisters, as well as the followers of African traditional religion, are undergoing the same trials and sorrows of the present moment, and they too long for peace and security. It is your duty, my dear Brothers, to build on these common sentiments and to encourage every initiative aimed at restoring that harmony and friendship which formerly marked the relations between your countries. The Catholic Church throughout the world supports you in this task and spares no effort herself in promoting solidarity and peaceful coexistence among peoples.

With the Great Jubilee of the 2,000th anniversary of the Birth of our Saviour Jesus Christ drawing ever nearer, we reaffirm our belief that "Christ, who died and was raised up for all, can through his Spirit offer man the light and the strength to measure up to his supreme destiny" (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 10). Therefore, I invite you to open your hearts to the promptings of the Holy Spirit and to lead with courage the people that God has entrusted to your pastoral care. Inspire in them the holiness of life and the knowledge of the Gospel which alone can make them witnesses to the truth, justice, universal goodwill and brotherhood which are the building- blocks of peace.

I pray for your countries and their leaders, that the hearts of all will turn towards the paths of dialogue and peace. I renew my appeal to the international community to be of assistance in ways that fully respect your countries' independence and your peoples' dignity. A practical way to achieve this goal is the immediate implementation of the Framework of Peace proposed by the Organization of African Unity and already agreed to by the two governments.

I commend the Church in Ethiopia and Eritrea to the intercession of Mary, Mother of the Redeemer, who 2,000 years ago brought into the world the Incarnate Word, the Light of the Nations. May she obtain for you, the Pastors, and for the priests, religious and lay faithful of your particular Churches, the comfort of grace and the strength of faith, hope and love that will sustain you all in the present difficulties. May "Jesus Christ, the one Saviour of the world, yesterday, today and for ever" (cf. Heb 13:8) always be your hope and encouragement.

As a token of my concern for you, and with the assurance of my prayerful solidarity, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, 27 April 1999.

JOHN PAUL II