



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC PILGRIMAGE TO AFRICA

(MAY 2-12, 1980)

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE CHURCH OF GHANA

*Cathedral of Accra
Thursday, 8 May 1980*

*Venerable and dear Brothers in the Episcopate,
Beloved brothers and sisters in Christ,*

1. After his Ascension into heaven, our Lord Jesus Christ sent the Holy Spirit upon his Apostles and into his Church. The Holy Spirit was Jesus' first gift to those who believe. Jesus himself had foretold the coming of the Spirit of Truth when he said: "... he will bear witness to me and you also are witnesses"[1].

And today in Accra, in this Cathedral dedicated to the Holy Spirit, we have assembled to celebrate this mystery, this great reality of the Holy Spirit's presence in the Church - *the presence of the Holy Spirit who continues to bear witness to Jesus* and who stirs up new witnesses among the faithful in every generation. We rejoice to know that the Holy Spirit is with us still, that he unites the Church in her communion and in her ministry[2]. We rejoice that through the power of the Holy Spirit the great life-giving message of the death and Resurrection of Jesus has been passed on down the centuries, and that is has been brought to Ghana.

2. After the efforts at evangelization that had been made in previous centuries, two generous priests, Father Moreau and Father Murat, succeeded a hundred years ago in establishing the Catholic Church in this land. We praise the grace of God that brought them to the people of Ghana on that Pentecost Tuesday in 1880. *And we bless the memory of all the missionaries* who came subsequently, in order to bear witness to Christ through the power of his Holy Spirit. *The seed of*

God's word planted on Ghanaian soil has taken root, it has grown into a large tree and has brought forth fruits of holiness for the glory of the Most Holy Trinity.

In spite of difficulties and the vicissitudes of history, the Gospel has been freely offered and freely accepted. The Kingdom of God has been preached, and over and over again evangelization has reached its dynamic summit in the "clear proclamation that in Jesus Christ, the Son of God made man, who died and rose from the dead, salvation is offered to all men, as a gift of God's grace and mercy"[3].

The genuine charity of Christ was the motivation for one missionary Congregation after another in sending its members to serve Ghana and her people, and the same genuine charity of Christ was the authentic means that bore such effective witness to the Gospel. Priests, Sisters and Brothers came on a mission of salvation and service. Each fulfilled his or her role. All of them together, through the power of the Holy Spirit, built up the Church by word and deed, by prayer and sacrifice. At a later date lay mission helpers came too, bearing witness to the universal missionary nature of the Church.

And all of these labourers for the Gospel have served valiantly - and with God's help they will continue to work generously, side-by-side with their Ghanaian brothers and sisters, in the harvest of the Church.

3. But the same Holy Spirit who sustained dedicated missionaries also raised up *new followers for Christ*, vivifying the local Church and calling its members in turn to share the great task of evangelization. In the strength of the Paschal Mystery, people accepted the word of God; they believed and were baptized; they were nurtured on the Eucharist and came to maturity in Christian living. Entire Christian communities accepted the challenge to "walk in newness of life"[4] and to embrace the challenge of the Beatitudes in their fullness. The missionary contact that had begun with human affability and kindness led finally to the full flowering of parishes, which became "the prime mover and pre-eminent place for catechesis" and "a major point of reference for the Christian people"[5].

From the midst of these parishes and other Christian communities there came forth those generous young people who would heed God's call to the priesthood and religious life and thus, together with the laity, fulfil their distinctive role in the one Church of God, as "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people"[6].

In due time, *Ghanaian Bishops were appointed to the pastoral leadership of the People of God.*

With gratitude for what had already been achieved in the work of evangelization, they entered into the continuity of apostolic succession. The fact that all the Bishops of this country are now native Ghanaians is an eloquent testimony to the success of the work of the missionaries and to the solid

implantation of the Church in this land. For this we give special thanks to God on the occasion of the celebration of this centenary.

4. *The one Body of Christ* was likewise to perceive its common task, its essential mission, its deepest identity, which was later so accurately expressed by Paul VI in this way: "Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church"[7]. Above all, the spread of the Gospel was to be linked with the witness of love, in accordance with Christ's words: "This is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you"[8]. In the observance of this commandment all Christian societies find their secure basis. And the love to which all Christians are called is itself the ladder by which every generation ascends to God and to eternal life.

5. You, *my brother priests*, at the service of your brothers and sisters of the laity - all of whom are called to holiness of life, all of whom are witnesses for the Kingdom of God - you have the particular mission of proclaiming the Gospel in its fullest enactment, which is the celebration of the Eucharist, wherein the work of redemption is renewed. In a special way you participate in the mission of Jesus for the benefit of the whole Body of Christ; you share deeply in the burning desire of his soul: "I must proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom... for I was sent for this purpose"[9]. It is because of this that you have offered your lives in celibacy and pastoral charity, to stay close to your people, to lead them in the path of salvation, building up the Church in faith and love, and in the unity and peace of Christ.

And you, *men and women Religious of Ghana*, you are called to the service of your brothers and sisters through a multiplicity of activities motivated by love. But your greatest contribution is not what you do, but what you are. By your consecration to the Lord Jesus himself you show that the Gospel is the full expression of all human values and that the love of Jesus Christ has first place in the pilgrim Church. Yes, your consecration is a normal expression of the full and healthy life of the Church. The maturity of ecclesial life in Ghana requires the oblation of your lives - made with generosity and lived out in persevering charity and joy. In your self-sacrifice for the sake of the Kingdom of God you become ever more intimately united with all your people, sharing the hopes of their everyday lives and helping them to fulfil their deepest aspirations for eternal life.

And to you *the seminarians* I say this: Remember that you are called to be close to Christ. You are meant to be his friends, his companions, his collaborators in the mystery of salvation. To accomplish this you must pray, for only in prayer will you come to know Jesus, to love Jesus and to understand fully the needs of his people. There are many aspects to your seminary training. The good of God's people requires that you should be intellectually prepared in ecclesiastical and secular sciences, that you should understand deeply your own culture, so that you will be able to bring the word of God to it effectively. But all your studies and activities must be preceded and followed by prayer. Only through prayer will you be sustained in the love of Christ, only through prayer will your lives be relevant. When the Pope goes back to Rome, remember that he told you this: "Let us not lose sight of Jesus, who leads us in our faith and brings it to perfection"[10].

Viewing the Church in Ghana, I cannot but say a special word about the *family*. Since it is the community in which every person is born, the family is therefore the foundation on which all wider communities are built. Let every family truly be a "domestic church", a community where the Lord Jesus has the central place, where children learn to know and love God, where prayer is the binding force. In this community of love and life, the future of society is decided, and the peace of the world is built.

6. And together with your Bishops and with the Church throughout the world, you *the faithful of Ghana* - all the clergy, religious, seminarians and laity - are called to holiness of life, to bear witness to Christ, and to spread the Good News of salvation. *To all of you belongs a share in the evangelization of the world*. It is the work of the Holy Spirit; it is he who gives witness to Jesus in this our age and confirms all his members as witnesses to the Lord Jesus and to his Gospel of love. All of you in this centenary year of grace are summoned to hear Christ's words: "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven"^[1].

Beloved brothers and sisters: *this is why I have come to Ghana: to bear witness to Christ, who was crucified and who rose from the dead, and to tell you all that we share a common mission in bringing Jesus to the world*.

In our task of bearing witness to her Son, Mary the Mother of Jesus will assist us. She is the Mother of the entire Body just as she is the Mother of the Head. She is the Help of Christians; she is the cause of our joy.

And to her Son Jesus Christ and to his Eternal Father be all praise and glory in the unity of the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. Amen.

Je n'oublie pas non plus les chrétiens du Togo et les chrétiens du Bénin qui ont tenu à venir jusqu'ici, avec leurs pasteurs, pour voir le Pape, écouter sa parole, prier avec lui et lui donner le témoignage de leur attachement. Je regrette de n'avoir pu visiter vos pays et vos Eglises cette fois-ci. Je demande à Dieu de vous bénir, de bénir vos familles, surtout ceux qui sont dans l'épreuve. Et dites-bien à vos compatriotes que le Pape pense aussi à vos Eglises, qu'il prie pour elles, en soutenant le ministère de vos évêques qui sont mes frères. A chacun de vous, mon affection et mes encouragements.

[1] *Io.* 15, 26-27.

[2] Cfr. *Lumen Gentium*, 4.

[3] Pauli VI *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 27.

[4] *Rom.* 6, 4.

[5] Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Catechesi Tradendae*, 67.

[6] *1 Petr.* 1, 9.

[7] Pauli VI *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 14.

[8] *Io.* 15, 12.

[9] *Luc.* 4, 43.

[10] *Hebr.* 12, 2.

[11] *Matth.* 5, 16.

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